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A

LETTER

TO THE

REV. MR. JACOB GREEN,

OF NEW-JERSEY,

Pointing out some Difficulties in the Calvinistic Scheme of Divinity, respecting *Free Will, Divine Decrees, Particular Redemption,* &c. and requesting a Solution of them.

BY HUGH KNOX,

Minister of the Gospel in the Island of Saba, in the West-Indies.

Say not that it is through the Lord that I fell away; for thou oughtest not to do the things that he hateth. Say not thou, He hath caused *me to err;* for he hath no *need of the sinful man. The Lord hateth all abomination, and they that fear God love it not. He himself made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his counsel. If thou wilt to keep the commandments, and to perform acceptable faithfulness; he hath set fire and water before thee; stretch forth thy hand unto whether thou wilt. Before man is* life *and* death; *and whether him liketh shall be given him. Son of Sirach.* Ecclus.

See, I have set before thee this day life *and* good, *and* death *and* evil. *I call heaven and earth to record against you this day, that I have set before you* life *and* death, blessing *and* cursing; *therefore* choose life, *that thou and thy seed may live. Moses.*

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ADVERTISEMENT.

"The attention of the reader is invited to the following treatise. It relates to some religious topics that are frequently, and with interest, discussed among Christians. Mr. Knox, the author, was a *Presbyterian* Minister, and resided for several years in this country, but afterwards removed to the West-Indies, and died on the island of St. Croix. In the following re-publication of his letters, the introduction, and some other sentences are omitted, which were not essential to the argument; and a note to the introduction is incorporated with the letter."

This treatise was re-published, with the foregoing introduction, in the Churchman's Magazine. A number of copies are struck off in the present form, at the expense of that establishment.

New-York, 1809.

A

LETTER

TO THE

REV. JACOB GREEN.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

YOUR very kind letter came safe to hand some weeks ago, with your printed sermon on "The sinner's faultiness and spiritual inability;" for both of which I thank you.**********

I intirely approve of, and cordially adhere to, that scheme of religion which tends to *exalt* GOD and *humble the creature*. I think GOD can never be exalted high enough in the thoughts of the creature, nor the sinful creature sunk low enough in his own thoughts: And if I could imagine that there was any one article in my creed which favoured the opposite, false, abominable doctrine, I would tear it off with indignation, and tear away that part of my heart which had harboured it. Yet I deem *sovereignty* in GOD to be an *amiable*, *qualified* perfection; and I dread to conceive of the ALMIGHTY as a *proud*, *partial*, *capricious* tyrant, in order to vindicate his independency on the creature, or under a pretence of doing this. And yet I cannot help thinking, as my mind is now circumstanced, that the Calvinistic doctrines of *particular redemption*, and *absolute*, *unconditional reprobation*, tend to excite this idea of the ever-blessed God!

I am so far of *Bolingbroke's* and his friend *Pope's opinion*, as to believe in a *qualified sense* of the phrase, that *whatever is*, *is right*, i. e. just as GOD *foresaw*, *determined* and *permitted* that

it should be; and that, of all possible plans of a world, he adopted *one of the best* upon the whole. This seems clearly deducible from the infinite power, wisdom and goodness of GOD. Though I greatly hesitate at that supposition of yours, "that GOD might have made a world of free agents, without a possibility of their falling into sin." I look on this as implying an absurdity. The contrary opinion, besides its evidence from reason, clears up or relieves many difficulties in our way of conceiving of the divine procedures. Whereas, on the other hand, if such an universe could have been made, it will be *hard*, if not *impossible*, for such creatures as we are, to conceive why it should not have been *best*.

Our reasonings on the necessity of introducing *sin* and *misery* into the system, in order to display the divine perfections, I conceive are at best very *arbitrary* and *hypothetical;* and it seems to give little advantage to our idea of the *divine benevolence*, to suppose it illustrated by the endless and inconceivable torments of millions of rational creatures, on the supposition that this *could* have been prevented by a *happy* and *sinless* system. It would be daring, I think, to say, that GOD had no other way of manifesting the glory of his perfections to his creatures, than by the eternal misery of a great number of them. Wherefore I conceive it safest to suppose (with all reverence be it spoken) that GOD *could not* (in consistence with his perfections, and the free agency of the creature) make a system of *free* ACCOUNTABLE creatures, without the *possibility* of sin's entering into such a system.* As to the *quantum* of sin in our system, it was doubtless *foreseen*, *permitted*, and is wisely *overruled* by GOD: But I confess I am by no means pleased with your way of wording this, viz. "GOD's *willing*, *ordering*, and, in his way, CAUSING this quantum of sin; and this too, as

* In your last letter you seem to triumph a little prematurely on what I here advance, and ask if this is consistent with a system which tends to *exalt* GOD, and *humble the creature?* I humbly conceive that it is, *Sir*. I never meant to say, nor can I think my words imply it, That GOD *could not* have prevented sin's entering, if he had so pleased: but this would be to destroy that *freedom* which I intended to maintain, by *confirming* such creatures in holiness. Surely you make some difference between *Adam*'s liberty in a state of innocence, and that of *Abimeleck* or any other sinner in the present state, where there is a dispensation of preventing restraining grace! Indeed I cannot reconcile the system of the *greatest benevolence* to any other plan, than the supposition of *such an impossibility*.

a *necessary* and glorious display of his *holiness!*" "CAUSING OF SIN, in the most *qualified sense*, seems a very harsh phrase, when applied to the GOD *of holiness*, and more especially as a *display of his holiness!*" I am still more at a loss to conceive how "GOD's having ordered *less sin* in our system, would have proved him to have been, not a *good* and *holy*, but an *envious* being!"

You have, indeed, in your last letter, in some measure, retracted these phrases, as *sounding harsh;* though you still seem to suppose they express an *important truth.* This, *my dear Sir*, does but the more confirm me in the suspicion, that a scheme of thinking, which requires *such language* to express it *roundly* and *clearly*, may be a little dangerous—and does the more attach me to the supposition advanced above; "that GOD *could not* (in consistency with the liberty of the creature) prevent sin's entering into the system; but that, having *permitted* it, upon a clear foresight of all its consequences, as best upon the whole, rather than not to produce such a system, he is determined to *overrule* it in such a manner, as will give a bright and perpetual display of his infinite power, wisdom, and goodness."

Were I thoroughly and convictively of your sentiments on this head, I readily allow that I could not possibly stumble at any doctrine of the *precurses* or CONCURSES of the *Calvinists.* But then, according to my present way of conceiving of these matters, I should have insuperable difficulties about the doctrines of a judgment to come, and a future state of rewards and punishments: Not being able to reconcile GOD's *causing of sin*, in any sense of the word, with his rectoral justice in judging, condemning, and eternally punishing the sinner. And hence I should be strongly inclined to fall in with a modern *Scotch* philosopher, who, in his "inquiry into the foundation and principles of morals," espouses the doctrine of *fate;* and, as a consequence of this, holds all our moral feelings to be *deceitful*, and makes sin an *impossibility.*

This, notwithstanding, I well know; that the gentlemen who hold these sentiments, disavow all such consequences, and doubtless, see reason, to believe as they do. While I am charitably and firmly persuaded of this, and am far from a certainty on which side the truth lies, I earnestly pray that GOD may so enlighten, enlarge and sanctify my understanding, and

direct my inquiries, as that I may be led into *all important* and *necessary* truth. Sure I am it would be highly criminal in me to embrace such a doctrine, while I continue to view it as inseparably connected with such dreadful consequences; as such a belief, in my present circumstances, must unavoidably excite in my mind a most *disagreeable* and *unworthy* idea of the Supreme Being. I can conceive of the *devil* as a most envious, malicious, revengeful spirit, replete with every malignant disposition, and wholly bent upon defacing the glory of the divine workmanship, and involving his more happy fellow-creatures in the same circumstances of guilt and misery with himself: But could I believe him endued with *creating power*, and making a world of rational immortal creatures, I know not whether my worst idea of him could induce me to believe him capable of *causing* these creatures of his to sin, and of punishing them for so doing, with eternal torments.

I am very far from believing that sin is a merely *fortuitous* thing in our system; or that it entered into it *beside* the knowledge, or *against* the will of the Creator. I firmly believe that GOD clearly foresaw and deliberately permitted it, in all its multiplied circumstances, aggravations and consequences; and that, in this view, it makes a *necessary* and very *important* part in the plan of our system. I believe also that it has by the wonderfully wise superintendency of GOD, though directly contrary to its own accursed nature and tendency, been made to produce much glory to GOD, and superabundant good to many of his creatures. But farther I dare not say at present. I believe it to be, in some sort, a *necessary* and *unavoidable* evil in the system; a *fatal* evil to numbers of GOD's creatures; and that nothing but infinite wisdom and power could ever have extracted one single grain of good from it. And although I firmly believe that all those rational creatures who are, or shall be, destroyed by it, are wholly the *criminal causes* of their own destruction, yet I believe them to be so very *unfortunate* and *unhappy* at the same time, that, could any other plan have been fixed upon, whereby sin could have been totally excluded, and the free agency of the creature secured, infinite benevolence would have fixed upon such a plan, in preference to the present, or any other where sin must have been admitted. And in perfect consistence with this idea of the *divine benevolence*, I

think I can conceive how GOD might *deliberately permit* sin to enter into our system rather than not form such a system; and punish impenitent sinners without having any real complacency in their misery; so that even the most miserable of all his creatures shall never have just reason to impeach the equity of his procedures. I can conceive that, notwithstanding this permission, GOD need be in no wise the cause of that sin which he is determined to punish with eternal torment in his creatures; but that sin is wholly the *creature* of *men* and *devils;* and that the misery they shall suffer, is the just and proportionate reward of their own evil devices: And, finally, that whosoever of our guilty, obnoxious race is saved, he shall be obliged to ascribe his salvation wholly to the *rich*, *free* and *undeserved* mercy of GOD in CHRIST.

In my present way of thinking, I have not the least doubt of the eternity of hell's torments. Not to mention the precision of Scripture in this article, I conceive it infinitely equitable that those who have an eternal weight of glory set before them, and put within their reach, by the Gospel, should suffer eternally for despising and rejecting it. So that, on principles of reason, I think I can justify the equity of the eternal punishment of Gospel despisers, at least. But were I to adopt the scheme of *universal benevolence*, upon your principles, and in the extent in which you seem to hold it, I think it would stagger me a little in the belief of that doctrine. If, by the principle of *universal benevolence*, you mean, " A disposition to promote the greatest good of the whole system, as far as the plan of the system will admit;" I readily grant that the misery of a great number of the creatures, may consist with the principle of *universal benevolence*, in the Creator; and in this sense, I subscribe to the doctrine. But if you mean that GOD, having it in his power to plan a system wherein sin and misery could not take place, was pleased, in preference, to adopt the present, and deliberately to *cause* and *introduce* a certain *quantum* of sin and misery for the *greater good* of the whole; I profess I cannot see how such a choice and preference can consist with the principle of *universal benevolence*—unless the effects of this benevolence be supposed to reach, one time or other, to *every individual* of such a system, and give unto *every such individual* a surplusage of happiness in the whole period of its existence; and this

would lead me unavoidably into the scheme of *Ramsey* and the other *universal redemptionists*. For I think, on this scheme of universal benevolence, no single individual of the whole system should be left in a state of endless misery, *merely* to *promote* and *advance* the *stability* and *happiness* of *some other individuals*. Wherefore I really think it behoved President *Edwards*, in a very particular manner, to confute *Ramsey*'s scheme; and I shall gladly purchase his book when it appears. I know of but one way of getting rid of this difficulty, and that is, by supposing that, although GOD could have made a sinless system of free agents in the sense above, yet in no other system than the present, could he have given so bright a display and manifestation of his perfections to his creatures; and that for this reason he preferred and adopted the present, though necessarily involving multitudes of his creatures in endless misery. But this, as I observed above, is a mere *begging of the question;* seeing it is *daring* in us to limit the divine wisdom, and *impossible* for us to know that GOD could not have given as bright a display of his perfections to the creatures of a system, into which sin and misery could not have entered: besides; not the *essential glory*, but the *universal benevolence* of GOD, is the idea to be reconciled with his preference of the present plan. GOD, according to my idea of him, is not a *selfish being*, who either *needs* or *desires* to have any of his perfections manifested at the expense of his creatures. His chief *declarative glory* consists in the exhibition of his *wisdom*, *holiness*, *justice*, *goodness*, and *mercy;* and without an evident display of these, he could not appear glorious to the apprehensions of his rational creatures. But to suppose him *preferring* a system *replete with sin*, and with the *endless misery* of numbers of his creatures, merely to illustrate two or three of his perfections, when he might have planned a system, consistent with the free agency of his creatures, from which sin and misery might have been precluded, seems utterly repugnant to the above amiable idea of the Almighty, and particularly inconsistent with his *universal benevolence*.

I really believe if any man were able to make this scheme *consistent with itself*, or to *cast light* on these *dark* and *deep things* of GOD, Mr. *Edwards* was that man. He was unquestionably an holy man, and he seems to have been all *penetration*

and *intellect;* and it well becomes a person so every way inferior as I am, to controvert the sentiments of so *great* and *good* a man, with the utmost modesty and deference. But I confess his *doctrine of the will* seems to me little else than a *doctrine of fate.* The constant dependence of our choice upon motives *external* or *without us;* the incontrolable power of these motives to produce our choice; and all these motives so *fixed* and *planted* by divine determination and providence, as that the chain can never be broken, but must infallibly draw with it the last link, render men's actions *so necessary*, that, in my opinion, there can be little room for *virtue* or *vice*, for *reward* or *punishment.* The creature does, indeed, in one sense, choose *very freely;* and yet, in another sense, he chooses *fatally*, and *cannot but* choose.* Yet, towards the latter end of this book, he, very dexterously, gives all these volitions and actions of the creature such a *moral colouring*, as to make them the proper objects of *praise* and *blame*, *reward* and *punishment.* Now, if the will of a man has no *elective*, *self-determining* power in the choice of objects, but is necessarily and unavoidably moved and determined by a train of external motives, so fixed and ordered in the plan of things, as never to fail in determining it; it matters not to me how *freely*, i. e. *spontaneously*, the man *chooses* or *refuses* the objects that present themselves to him—there is certainly *no possibility* of his choosing or refusing otherwise than he actually does; and I should think it as absurd to *praise* or *blame*, to *punish* or *reward* a man for being bound at a stake, as a man thus necessarily determined in all

* "That mind is said to be possessed of *natural liberty*, or *liberty of choice*, which is so constituted, as that its volitions shall not be *invincibly* determined, by any *foreign cause* or consideration whatever offered to it, but by its own sovereign pleasure.

"If any instance occurs in which the mind can choose *no otherwise than it does*, it is *not* in that instance *naturally free;* though it chooses with the *greatest delight*, and executes its volitions *without any restraint.*

"A man is said to be *morally free* when there is no interposition of the will of a superior being, to *prohibit* or *determine* his actions in any particular under consideration.

"What some call a *liberty of spontaneity*, consists merely in *choosing* to perform any particular action. Nor does it at all enter into the question, whether we can choose or perform the contrary. But since this is nothing more than *willing*, it does not deserve the name of *liberty.*" Vide Dr. *Doddridge*'s posth. Lect. ed. 1st. p. 34, 35, 36.

his volitions: and how to reconcile this with *moral* and *accountable freedom*, I am utterly at a loss.

President *Edwards* has indeed, in a very *logical* and *laboured* manner, endeavoured to establish the dependence of human choice and volition upon external motives, and to prove the absurdity and impossibility of the self-determining power of the will, and its inconsistence even with *common sense*, though it has been generally thought a dictate of this. And I confess I have neither leisure, nor perhaps penetration enough, to discover where the fallacy lies in his reasoning. But, while to me even greater absurdities and impossibilities seem to follow from his scheme, than from that of the self-determining power, I must needs suppose some fallacy in his reasoning, and can never adopt a scheme, which, as I conceive of it upon present evidence, intirely destroys *moral agency*. The case is this: You and President *Edwards* seem to me to hold a scheme, wherein all things are so *fixed*, *ordered* and *disposed* by a divine predetermination and decree, that, by a *necessity of consequence*, they *must* come to pass—nay, what is much more, that there is a proper *efficiency* and *casualty* on the part of GOD, in determining the volitions and actions of mankind, even those that are evil: for what less can be meant by GOD's laying a train of motives before these agents, which, as so many *necessary causes*, must infallibly produce their effects, and bring these volitions and actions into existence. This scheme you seem to think *necessary* in order to maintain the *supremacy* and *sovereignty* of GOD and the absolute dependence of the creature, and essential to the plan of the divine superintendency and government. And in order to support this scheme, you produce a number of plausible passages of Scripture which seem to countenance it; such as "the certain predisposal and predetermination of the sufferings and death of CHRIST, and the blameableness and guilt of the agents who fulfilled this decree;—GOD's being said to harden *Pharaoh*'s heart, and his guilt and punishment in acting in consequence of this supposed divine influence or appointment," and the like. Now the difficulty with me lies in reconciling this scheme with the *moral perfections* of GOD, and the *free agency* and accountableness of the creature. Could I do this clearly, I should have no objection to the scheme.

If GOD exerts any influence, or presents any motive, upon which a sinful action of the creature must *necessarily* follow; if, moreover, we suppose this influence *exerted* or motive *presented intentionally* and with *design* to *produce* this sinful action, as a *necessary* and *essential* part of the *divine plan*, I cannot for my life conceive how the Most High can stand clear of the charge of being the *proper efficient cause* of such sinful action, and of the guilt of it (if indeed it could be supposed to have any guilt at all): for according to Mr. *Edwards* himself, *The first cause*, in every chain of causes, is the *proper cause* of the *last effect* flowing from such a chain. At this rate I cannot conceive of men otherwise than as *necessary agents:* as *wheels*, *weights* or *pullies* in the machinery of the system; and consequently as little the proper subjects of *praise* or *blame*, *reward* or *punishment*, as so many pieces of clock-work: nor do I know how to reconcile this scheme of thinking with *James* i. 13—15, and numberless other plain scriptures.

Is it absurd and inconsistent to suppose, that the ALMIGHTY could endow a rational creature with a power of determining his own volitions, without rendering such a creature thereby independent on himself? and, in order to ascertain GOD's absolute sovereignty over this free creature, is it not sufficient to suppose that he perfectly foresees his free volitions and determinations; has him ever perfectly within the reach of his power, and can, by proper motives, suited to his rational nature and moral freedom, so influence, restrain, direct, or over-rule these volitions, as to make the tenor of his conduct comport with the general plan and design of his providence? Can we not conceive of GOD as decreeing or determining to make such a world as ours, and such creatures as we are; and as foreseeing by his all-comprehensive knowledge, the free volitions of his human creatures, and what course every individual of the species would take, according to their respective natures and circumstances? and can we not conceive of him as powerfully and efficaciously predisposing some of them, by proper motives and influences, to effectuate the *quantum* of good he intended; —and as putting it in the power of others to do good, if they chose it;—yet leaving them such a liberty of choice as he foresaw they *might*, yea, and *would* abuse, and thereby become the instruments of fulfilling the divine counsels by such volitions

and actions as are morally evil, and in so doing, become justly *culpable* and *punishable?*

Although we acknowledge that GOD positively determined the sufferings and death of his *dear Son* for the redemption of human sinners; yet can we not suppose that he appointed this tragical event to happen in a time and place where he foresaw that many would be so desperately wicked, such abusers of their liberty, so criminally inattentive to the true character of the *Messiah* as laid down in ancient prophecy, and so blinded with prejudices of different kinds, as to reject *the holy One and the Just*, to thirst for his blood, and to *take, and with wicked hands to crucify and slay the* LORD *of Glory;* and thus, with the most *criminal* and *blameworthy* intention, to fulfil his high decree? Does it imply any absurdity or contradiction to suppose that the guilty actors in this tragedy; that *Judas*, *Pilate* and the *Jews*, had sufficient motives to *will* and *act* the very reverse of what they did; and that they had it in their power to comply with these better motives; and that their willing and acting upon different ones, was the *formal cause* of their *guiltiness* and *punishableness?* May we not suppose that many of these men, and *Pharaoh*, had, by grieving the Holy Spirit, whereby they might have been sealed unto the day of redemption, out-sinned their day of grace; and that they were become the proper objects of divine dereliction, and were justly given over by GOD to a reprobate mind to work all manner of wickedness with greediness; and consequently that GOD might, consistent with his moral perfections, use these creatures, already *self-fitted for destruction*, as instruments to fulfil these his decrees —to the doing of which no more seems needful, than that GOD should leave these creatures (being no longer in a probationary state, any more than *devils*) to work *their own corrupt will*, and only over-rule them in working it? When a creature has out-sinned his day of grace, and is no longer a probationer for happiness, what absurdity is there in supposing that he may be employed by GOD, as the *devils* are, in doing the *drudgery* (if I may so express myself) of the universe?

By this scheme of thinking, if I mistake not, all the principal difficulties in the divine plan may be accounted for, and we shall steer clear of that *fatal concatinated* chain of motives which seems to bear so hard on *human liberty* and the *moral*

perfections of GOD. We shall see how justly the wicked are blamed and punished for abusing a liberty which they might have used to better purposes;—and how justly *Pharaoh* and *Judas* and *Pilate*, who might have now been in glory, by complying with sufficient motives to virtue, are now *gone to their place* in consequence of their having made a different choice.

I am highly charmed with that idea of GOD whereby he is represented to the mind as a being of *infinite*, *essential* and *universal benevolence*. No scriptural definition of the Supreme Being pleases me more than that *laconic* and *expressive* one, of the beloved Apostle, "GOD *is* LOVE;" or that other more diffuse and circumstantial one, wherein he is pleased to declare his own nature; "The LORD, the LORD GOD, *merciful* and *gracious*," &c. And the psalmist has made such a representation of the exertion of this temper in GOD towards the creature, as, in my opinion, justifies the highest and warmest things we can say of it. "*He is good, and doeth good. The* LORD *is good unto* ALL, *and his tender mercies are* OVER ALL HIS WORKS." From this scriptural representation, I think, we must necessarily infer, that BENEVOLENCE is the *prime character* of the DEITY; that his goodness spontaneously flows out to all the proper objects of it; that he never made, or could make, a creature to whom he did not primarily design happiness; and that even all those of his creatures, who, by sin, have forfeited all title to his *goodness*, *have been*, or *will be*, under a dispensation of his *mercy* (the *devils* perhaps only excepted, who having fallen from the highest state of dignity and felicity, without a tempter, are justly *reserved in everlasting chains under darkness*, *unto the judgment of the great day*)—otherwise it will be difficult to ascertain the full meaning of that emphatical expression; "*His tender mercies are over* ALL *his works*."

What you say on this subject is, I think, *excellent*, and seems to imply all that I have advanced. "GOD existed when nothing else did; a being of infinite wisdom or intelligence; infinitely happy. His happiness consisting in the infinite rectitude of his nature, and the infinite love and delight of himself.—'GOD *is love*.'—Therefore if he exert himself or manifest himself *ad extra*, it must be according to the infinite rectitude, love and benevolence of his nature. If he exhibit himself in creation,

and creatures can see him by that exhibition, it must be according to *what he is*, and not according to *what he is not;* that is, his exhibitions must appear to the creature, to be in *love* and *benevolence;* that is, in the end and issue of all things, they must and will appear so, to those who view things as they are. Now, as nothing can exist, or take place in being, but upon the divine plan and volition from eternity, I must suppose that every thing that exists, was best upon the whole, or the greatest display of the divine benevolence."—I, for my part, suppose so too: but how, my *dear Sir*, can this idea of GOD tally or comport with that *fatal chain* of *causal motives*, whereby a vast number of the fallen race of *Adam* are inevitably drawn into a state of endless misery, for the greater good of the system? If one of these miserable creatures is permitted to "see GOD in this exhibition of him," and his faculties are not supposed to be totally changed from what they are at present; can he say *in truth* that GOD is *good unto* ALL; that he hath been good and merciful unto him? Is this consistent with the above idea of the divine benevolence? Or, can infinite wisdom find no other expedient to promote the *general good of the system*, than by ordering and planning things so, that a considerable part of it shall, without any *dispensation of mercy* and *proper state of trial*, be doomed to eternal torments, by an *absolute* decree of *preterition* in a state of hereditary corruption and misery, from which they never had it put within the reach of their power to deliver themselves, or to be delivered? Does this seem consistent with our natural notions of divine *equity*, much more of his *benevolence to all*, and those *tender mercies* of his, which are *over all his works?* Or is it fair and charitable to suspect men of *want of humility*, or holding a system inconsistent with the proper *sovereignty of* GOD and *dependence of the creature*, who hesitate to adopt such a scheme of thinking as this? Surely we ought to be persuaded, upon the most *convictive* and *infallible* evidence, that the soul of man hath no *self-determining power;* no liberty of *choosing* or *refusing* the objects set before it, before we can be warranted to give up, with all these, our *natural* and *scriptural* notions of GOD's *rectoral justice* and *paternal benevolence* to his creature, in order to make room for such an idea of the divine sovereignty, as is *unamiable* in itself, and seems to strike *such a fatal blow* at the

very vitals of moral agency! It tends, in my opinion, greatly to embarrass and mislead in this dispute, to compare the soul of man, in its acts of volition, to *inanimate things* and *necessary agents*, such as *chains*, *scales* and *balances*, moved by *weights*, and the like. What comparison or similitude can there be between a *material*, *inanimate machine*, and a *living*, *active*, *conscious immaterial substance*, bearing the natural image of GOD? Or how can the mode of agency or operation in one of these things, be even illustrated or made more intelligible, by the mode of agency or operation in the other? Mr. *Edwards*'s doctrine of the necessary connection between moral effects and their causes; i. e. the motives which produce them, is indeed an *intricate* and *perplexed* piece of work; and here I am apt to suspect the fallacy in his whole subsequent reasoning originates: For can it indeed be proved absurd to suppose GOD capable of making a creature, which, after its being brought into existence, should be *self-moving* and *self-determining;* so far the *source* and *cause* of its own actions, as to render it properly accountable for these actions: and this, without supposing the *necessity* of its being irresistibly weighed down by motives, as a *scale* is by *weights*, or dragged about hither and thither as a *puppet* by *wires*, or a *chain* by the hand of a *superior intelligence?* Or, can nothing but such a creature as this be supposed absolutely dependent on its Maker; or a proper subject of moral government? Is it not sufficient to ascertain the *proper dependence* of a human soul upon GOD, that he has made it, and given it its powers (one of which is a liberty of choice)—that he foresees its free volitions, and *can* and *does*, control and alter them when he pleases? And if man were such a creature as this, could it be said, with any propriety, that man is *independent* on GOD?

It is to me a very small matter, in this controversy, what *quantum* of evil there is in the universe by the fault of *men* or *devils*, provided GOD can be exculpated from the charge of having any *causality* in producing it, and that his ways to man can be vindicated: So that he shall appear, to right reason, *just* and *holy*, *true* and *sincere*, in all his dealings and transactions with his creatures. And to make this appear in a *clear* and *unexceptionable* light, upon your principles, at the same time removing the main objections I have alleged against

them, will be a *proper* and *satisfactory* answer to this letter, and will put an agreeable end to the controversy.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

I would here, once for all, beseech you to consider me in the humble capacity of a *learner* in the present controversy, and not as a *pertinacious disputant* wrangling for victory. The truth is great, and will prevail. This is my wish and earnest desire, both with regard to my own case, and the whole Christian Church. If, therefore, in any passages of this letter I may seem to push matters *too far*, or with *too much warmth*, I intreat you not to misconstrue such passages, either into want of reverence for the *sacred subjects of controversy*, or rudeness to *you*. The former I *dread* and *abhor;* of the latter I hope you would not suspect me. I have such a firm persuasion of your *piety*, and such a respect for your *judgment* and *candour*, as will, I hope, ever keep me at the greatest distance from uncharitableness, either in thought or language. Besides; there breathes such a spirit of *kindness* and *goodness* through all your letters, as secures both my affection and gratitude. I highly venerate men of worthy character, though of different sentiments; believing they may all be right in *fundamentals*, or innocently mistaken in *non-essentials:* but I can call no man *master*, save CHRIST alone. Great names, great abilities, or even great piety and grace can be of little weight with me, in forming my religious sentiments, so long as I continue to believe that no *mere man is infallible* in his judgment. If, therefore, I shall be thought in this letter, to have pushed some matters as far as they will bear, and with some appearance of warmth and attachment to a favourite system; it is with design that they may appear in the *strongest light*, and thereby extort from you the more satisfactory *eclaircissement*. Nor shall I dread to see my own opinions set in the most *absurd*, *ridiculous* or *blasphemous* light they will bear, provided I may be thereby convicted of their *falsity* and *dangerous tendency*.

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As to your last printed sermon,* I think it would be, *in the main*, and with *some alterations*, an excellent one, from a person

* Entitled "*The Sinner's Faultiness, and Spiritual Inability*," from *Rom.* ix. 19. Printed at *New-York*, 1767.

in my present way of thinking. The distinction between *natural* and *moral* inability, I have ever thought an important and useful one, when well stated and explained. My worthy and excellent friend, President *Burr*, was the first who ever gave me an idea of this distinction. He did it in three sermons preached from *Joshua* xxiv. 19. "*Ye cannot serve the* LORD: *for he is an holy* GOD," &c. He acknowledged they were the substance of Mr. *Edwards*'s book relative to that subject, and expressed a pretty strong desire of having them printed, as some of the most useful and important he had ever preached. All the world I suppose are agreed in the idea of *natural inability*; and were I to define *moral inability*, it would be in terms like these: "A natural and contracted disinclination or aversion to the exercises of piety and moral virtue, which becomes faulty and criminal by our resisting motives which would have overcome it, and wilfully neglecting to apply to GOD through the REDEEMER, by prayer and the other instrumental duties of religion, for those influences of his HOLY SPIRIT (freely offered to all who seek them) by which it would have been totally subdued, and our volitions and actions engaged on the side of piety and moral rectitude."—But now, seriously, on the scheme of a *particular redemption* (into which, I believe you yourself, and all my brethren with you, have gone*)

* You'll pardon me, *my dear Sir*, for this mistake concerning your opinion, and that of my brethren in your neighbourhood. I made it on a presumption that you were thorough Calvinists, in the sense in which that doctrine is taught by *Calvin*, *Turretine*, *Pictete*, *Witsius*, *Usher*, and other school divines. Your sentiments, and those of our brethren, on this article, are very *generous*, *catholic*, and *unexceptionable* indeed, and such as I have no objection against. You say, "The most, if not all, your brethren in the ministry, are *so large* in their notions of *redemption*, that you suppose I would have no controversy with them, on that head;——and that as to yourself, you suppose, you are somewhat peculiar, being *more an universal Redemptionist* than any of them. You suppose that your notion of CHRIST's redemption is more extensive than mine.—That CHRIST's death and atonement was for all the human race. His death, you suppose, was not to purchase the love of GOD, nor the influences of the Spirit—but to open a way to save sinners, consistent with GOD's justice and holiness—to show the evil of sin, to vindicate GOD's government, and the honour of his laws. You suppose also that it was the *deobstruent* cause of the Spirit's influences. It was, that the goodness of GOD might flow to any of the human race, without eclipsing the glory of any of the divine perfections. *By this* the way is opened for *all mankind* to come to GOD, through JESUS CHRIST. The design of CHRIST's death," you say, "may be considered as the same, whether a greater or a smaller number of *Adam*'s race be finally saved by him." You declare, in *short*, "that in your view of things, you have no difficulty in saying, that CHRIST's death and

I see no propriety at all in this distinction, as held forth to the hearers of the gospel in general. I would first point out what I take to be an error in your definition of *natural inability*. You say, repeatedly, *pages* 15, 17, &c. of your sermon, that "natural inability is the *want of power*, or *faculty* to do what persons have *a will* to do, what they choose and desire to do—that it *always* supposes some impediment or insurmountable difficulty in the way, where there is a *will, desire and heart to and for a thing*." I think the last clause of this definition, printed in *italics*, should be wholly omitted: For I imagine that an *insurmountable obstacle* or a *natural impossibility* of our doing any thing, whether our *heart* or *will* be *for it*, or *against it*, fully constitutes our natural inability of performing that thing. e. g. I am naturally unable to remove a mountain,

atonement was EQUALLY *for all mankind*." No universal Redemptionist, not even *Arminius* himself, ever went beyond this. I find, therefore, that I have no controversy with you, on this head; and therefore that part of my letter which combats *particular redemption*, is only permitted to continue in the letter, for the sake of those whom I take to be thorough Calvinists in this article. I wonder, however, that "you are ready to suppose I misunderstand the Calvinistic writers on this head;" though you grant it "possible that there may be a *real opposition* between them and me." Indeed, *Sir*, I think I do not misunderstand them: But least I should be mistaken, I refer the candid reader to *Calvin*'s institutions, *Turretine*, *Pictete*, and almost all the systematic Calvinist writers, on the articles of the *divine decrees*, *predestination*, *election*, *reprobation* and *redemption*; also to *Edwards* on the *five points*. But, *my dear Sir*, the more you are of an *universal Redemptionist*, the more difficult I find it to conceive of the consistency of your principles. The system of the ancient Calvinists is *well jointed*, and hangs together, be it *right* or *wrong*. But to tack universal redemption, in the sense you hold it, to Mr. *Edwards*'s doctrine of the will, and make them consistent, requires, in my opinion, a great deal of ingenuity indeed.

Calvinism, I find, while it still denominates a sect, has greatly and almost essentially changed its nature since *Calvin* wrote. The generality of the first reformers in *England* and *Scotland* were *supra-lapsarians*. *Calvin* himself (so well as I remember, for I have not his institutions by me) and the most of the Calvinists about the beginning of the present century, were *sub-lapsarians*. But *Calvinism*, as now generally embraced by President *Edwards*'s admirers, seems to me as different from *original Calvinism*, as it is from *Arminianism*. It seems to me some *middle thing*, patch'd up of both; and that, if it must have a name, it should be called *Edwardism*. I would that the Protestant world could be prevailed on wholly to drop these invidious nominal distinctions, which almost ever affix the idea of *heresy* or *damnable error* to the opposite party. I think it a violation of that law, whereby we are commanded to *call no man master, save* CHRIST. Though I believe myself to be more of a *Calvinist* than an *Arminian*, yet I disclaim both these appellations, as I can subscribe to neither of these great men throughout. And for the like reason, I think *you*, and *my brethren with you*, should do the same. It is enough, if we are *Christians* indeed.

whether I *will* and *choose* it or *not*. My *willing*, or *not willing*, makes no manner of odds in my *power* or *ability*. The thing is wholly beyond any *natural power of mine*.

The same will, in my opinion, holds equally true in *moral* or *spiritual*, as it does in *natural* difficulties. If there be any *insurmountable obstacle* in my way, to any moral or spiritual attainment, it is, in the nature of things, wholly as impossible for me to remove *this obstacle*, as to remove *the mountain*.

Having thus abridged this definition to what I think its true and natural limits, I would farther say—That, upon the scheme of a particular redemption, it is *as impossible* for the *non-elect* or *reprobate*, to be saved, or to *do* or *obtain* any thing *spiritually good*, as it is for me to remove a mountain; so that the *moral inability* they are under, is to all intents and purposes, a *natural one:* for were it even possible that they could have a *will* and *desire* to be saved, yet are they under a *natural impossibility* of salvation;—for *them* no Saviour was intended or provided;—to *them* no Saviour was sent;—for *them* no Saviour died;—for *them* was no spirit purchased,—and to *them* no salvation is *really* and *sincerely* offered. It is then *ipso facto* impossible for them to *believe*, *repent*, or do any thing spiritually good, or to obtain any power of doing these things; and much more *to be saved*. I do not mean, that they have no such power *in themselves;* for in this respect, all are on a footing; but there is an *insurmountable obstacle* in the way: the thing *cannot* be: and therefore, by your own concession, they must be wholly blameless in not believing, repenting, &c. i. e. in not doing *natural impossibilities*. If, to this it is answered, as it generally is by Calvinists, that man, by his apostacy, has brought this *impotency* upon himself; and that man's having lost his ability of doing good, does not deprive God of his just requisitions upon man; so that God *may justly* and *equitably* enjoin many duties upon man, which he hath now, through his apostacy, no power of performing:—that these commands are *just* and *equitable* in themselves, and therefore may be, and ought to be enjoined on an impotent creature, and the like; I will more particularly consider this matter below. I would at present observe,

That the scriptures seem to lay the grand cause of *guiltiness* and *condemnableness* in sinners, not so much on their original

apostacy and the corruption of their nature, as upon their not coming to CHRIST as their Saviour, and believing in him, and complying with his saving design, and cherishing the motions of his spirit, and repenting of their sins, and doing something which GOD hath graciously put it in their power to do, and which he is continually *disposing* and *exciting* them to do; continually *working* or *operating in them, both to will and to do* the things that are pleasing to him. The gospel seems uniformly to offer salvation to the *greatest* of sinners, to *all* sinners, and to tell them, without exception or limitation, that a Saviour is provided for them, and that it is some how or other *wholly* their own fault if they do not come to him, and embrace him, and be saved by him: all which must be *absolutely false* and *shamefully trifling*, if CHRIST did not die for *all* sinners, and if the benefits of his death were not put properly within the reach of *all* gospel sinners, without exception; or if there were any *natural* or *insurmountable obstacle* put in the way of the salvation of *any* such sinner, by *decrees*, *fatal concatenation of irresistible motives*, or otherwise. So that if there be any truth in this remark, then, either the Calvinistic doctrine of particular redemption is *antiscriptural* and *absurd*, or the distinction of *moral inability* is applicable only to the *unconverted elect*, and is very *improper* and *untrue* when addressed to the hearers of the gospel promiscuously, as applicable to them all.

Indeed, I have always deemed it either *dishonest* or *trifling*, in *particular Redemptionists*, to address the offers of the gospel to *all in general*, and to urge all in general to *believe in* CHRIST, *repent*, &c. with a solemn assurance that no obstacle stood in the way of the salvation of any sinners of *Adam*'s race, but their own perverseness and unwillingness to come to CHRIST, that they might have life. I have such an abhorrence of *insincerity*, that, I protest, were I into this scheme of thinking, I should think myself obliged to preface every discourse in which the offers of salvation were made to sinners, with some such declaration as this: "My poor fellow-sinners, GOD hath, of his sovereign pleasure, chosen some of the corrupt mass of mankind to eternal life, and hath passed by the rest, and left them to perish everlastingly without remedy. Who this happy number are, we know not: but in hopes that some of them may be among my audience, who are still in their sins, I am commissioned, in the

name of GOD, to make these offers *to such*, being assured that one time or other, they will be called by his grace, and have their *moral impotence* and *inability* removed by this call.—As to the rest of you, whoever you are, your case is *irremediable* and *desperate*. You have no claim to these tenders, nor can you have any part in this gospel salvation. Nevertheless, it will be your duty quietly to acquiesce in, and even to approve of, this disposal of things, as your eternal misery will be so over-ruled as to promote the *general good of the system*, and to manifest the glory of the divine sovereignty in the final issue of things. Yet, as it is impossible for any of you to know, in particular, that you are the unhappy persons; you are all, without exception, commanded and invited by the *external call* of the gospel, to *believe*, *repent* and be *converted;* and these invitations and commands being *reasonable* in themselves, though a compliance with them be *impossible* to you, your *non-compliance* with them will justly aggravate your eternal misery."—Yet, *my dear and very worthy friend*, were I *thus persuaded*, methinks I would publish these glad tidings to my fellow sinners with an heavy heart and a faultering tongue; conscious that many of them were under a *natural impossibility* of embracing them, and yet were liable to an *increased condemnation* for rejecting them: for, *he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God.* John iii.

*The chief of these objections may be inferred from the following reasoning: "All men without exception or distinction are invited and commanded to come unto CHRIST and believe in him. All sober Calvinistic divines believe it to be the indispensable duty of all sinners, without exception, to obey these commands and comply with these invitations, and that they are justly condemnable and punishable in not doing so. They affirm (as CHRIST has done before them) that their not coming to CHRIST and believing in him, is *the formal cause* and an aggravating circumstance of their condemnation: *Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world*, and *men loved darkness rather than light.*

* This paragraph in the original text was inserted in a note to the introduction of the letters.

He *that believeth on* CHRIST *is not condemned: but he that believeth not, is condemned already*, BECAUSE *he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of* GOD. *He that hath not, and believeth not, the Son, shall not see life*, but *shall be damned.* It is also pretty generally allowed by Calvinistic divines, that to *come to* CHRIST and *believe in him*, implies in it not merely a belief that he is the only Saviour of human sinners in general, but that he *died for us*, and is *our Saviour* in particular, at least *in offer.* And indeed the very nature of faith; the very duty of *coming to* CHRIST and *believing on him*, seems necessarily to imply thus much in it, namely, THAT we come to him and apply to him under a firm persuasion that he is *our Saviour in offer*, and that we rely upon him, under this character, for redemption and remission of sins through his blood: for it is utterly inconceivable how we should *come to him*, *apply to him*, or *believe on him*, under any other notion, than that he *is our Saviour*, and that we *may* obtain salvation *by* and *through him.*—But now, if the Calvinistic doctrine of particular redemption be true, as it is taught by a great number of the ablest and most eminent divines, it would appear to follow from their own doctrines, that GOD commands *reprobate* or *non-elect* sinners TO BELIEVE A LIE; not only so, but that he condemns them and increases their condemnation FOR NOT BELIEVING THIS LIE; namely, that CHRIST died for *them;* is *their* Saviour; with all his benefits, is sincerely offered to their acceptance; and that if they would come to CHRIST and believe on him, *they might* have redemption and eternal life through his name. Whereas, according to their doctrines of *particular redemption* and *reprobation*, CHRIST never was the Saviour of reprobate or non-elect sinners, either in intention or offer, and never died *for them*, any more than *for devils.* They do indeed talk of many *benefits* and *advantages* which the *non-elect* enjoy by CHRIST, as life and all its blessings, this world and all its enjoyments, the *means of grace*, and a short respite from hell. But seeing all these supposed benefits only give them opportunity of aggravating their condemnation, by their continuing in unbelief and impenitency under that gospel, which can never profit them, the glad tidings of salvation by a Redeemer, together with present life and all its enjoyments, are so far from deserving the name of *benefits*, that, upon the whole, they

are *great* and *real disadvantages* to *all such*, and must needs be so, in the very nature of things.

But you disclaim the doctrine of *particular redemption*, and therefore are not chargeable with its consequences. Let us examine however whether you do not confound the ideas of *natural* and *moral inability* in your sermon, and whether *moral inability*, in some passages of it, does not, by fair construction, amount to that which is *properly natural.* Indeed, I cannot see it possible for any person of your principles to avoid confusion in this matter; because I think some of your principles utterly inconsistent with this distinction.

You in a manner begin your discourse with a *postulatum* which seems to need proof, by saying, *page* 4th, " That GOD might justly have left all mankind in their obstinacy and impenitency, without affording his *special*, or even *restraining* grace."—Yes, provided these were *self-contracted*, and arose not from original corruption, aided by a fatal train of invincible motives to evil, inducing necessity; in which case, I should imagine that the obstinacy and impenitency of mankind would have been blameless and guiltless. GOD might doubtless have justly extinguished the human race as soon as it fell, punishing only the *actually* guilty; but having spared it, and suffered it to propagate upon the earth, the question is, Whether he might have, consistent with his *justice* and *benevolence*, left it in a state of sin and misery, without affording it a dispensation of either *special* or *restraining* grace?—He *did not*, and therefore I argue that he *could not;* for he did what was *best*, and *could not* do otherwise. But these bold hypothetical *postulata* seem to be the natural offspring of a system which begins with the consideration of man in a fallen state, and passes slightly over the grand question, " How mankind came into those circumstances of sin and misery in which we now find them?" From an attentive consideration of which question, I imagine, the *necessity of a dispensation of mercy*, on GOD's part, will clearly appear; and that this mercy cannot be the *narrow*, *contracted partial* thing which particular redemptionists suppose, but must reach, in the possible attainment of it, to all the kind.

You assert, page 18 of the sermon, " The want of power," or *spiritual inability*, " is the want of will." " This want of will is all the inability there is. What GOD requires is the soul and

will, in that which is spiritually good. Man lost his spiritual ability, or good will, or inclination to good, by the depravity of human nature, at the fall." p. 14. Then GOD requires that which man hath not to give him, and never had since the fall: for "the sinner's *inability* is the same as the *depravity of nature;*" and "till GOD, by his omnipotent power, changes the heart and will," and puts the sinner within the reach of good motives, "he never will cease to love sin, and have an aversion to holiness." p. 20. It is a *good* heart and will that GOD requires of the sinner, which the sinner has not to give, and which he cannot have, until GOD gives it him. "If then a sinner *cannot* will a thing until he *hath willed* it; nor choose until he *hath chosen;* nor desire, until he *hath desired;*"* and that some power that he *hath not*, must first enable him to *will*, *choose* and *desire*, before he *can* do these things:—what can this be but a *natural inability?* It is the *want* of an ability which he hath never divested himself of, because he never possessed it: in short, it is such an inability as *frees him from blame*, (by *page* 12); because, to the giving of GOD the will he is supposed to demand, there is an "insuperable difficulty;" in as much as the man cannot give *what he has never had*, nor ever can obtain by any endeavours of his own: nay, the man cannot even *desire* it, or *wish* for it. "He *can* desire, when he *hath a desire*," but not before. Yet you say, (p. 19) "they have all the power that can be conceived in the nature of things for a sinner to have;—for they have light in the understanding; they see the reasonableness and fitness of things, and the obligations they are under," &c. I greatly question this. I always thought the *understanding* was sadly darkened and blinded by the fall;—that *the natural man could not* know, *nor* discern *the things of the spirit of* GOD,—and that it required the power of renewing grace to cure *this faculty* of its blindness; *that*, *the eyes of their understanding being enlightened*, sinners *might* know *what is the hope of his calling*, &c. But I find that Mr. *Hop-*

* This is a strange paradox founded upon Mr. EDWARDS's subtle doctrine of the will: Whereas surely we can conceive of a power inherent in an intelligent agent (such as the human soul) prior to its operation or exertion. May not a soul have a *power* of willing before it *wills?* May not I have a will to do something, before I exert this volition, so as to bring this thing into existence?

kins and you make out this faculty pretty sound and vigorous, as though it had suffered *little*, if *any* thing, by the original apostacy.

You assert, page 26th, "It is impossible to choose a new heart, without having a new heart."—Yet below—"GOD requires the *inclination*, *choice*, and *will* to that which is good;" and GOD must give this *new heart* before the sinner can *will* or even *desire* it. GOD then requires a *natural impossibility* from the sinner.

In the whole of the second branch (p. 29) you include natural *invincible* propensities in the notion of *spiritual inability*, and make no difference, in point of blameableness, between *them* and *such* as are contracted by *habit* and *indulgence*. You seem indeed to have been aware (p. 24) that there is some difference, as to *blame*, between propensities *born with us*, and those contracted "by custom and practice;" by keeping the *former* out of sight, while you argue the sinner's faultiness. But *here*, where you purpose to remove this weighty objection against blame, you seem very superficial; alleging, in general, that to plead any *abatement of blame* from original corruption, is, in fact, to cast the charge of it upon GOD, instead of *blaming* and *condemning* ourselves for *original sin*:* and then recurring to your definition of faultiness, you put off the matter lightly on which the greatest stress lies, by saying, "that this is the view of awakened convinced sinners."† I am of opinion that it is a sinner's *own* guiltiness,

* I would beg leave to put some questions here, to which I would beg *direct* and *categorical* answers. Do you think it possible for a man, judging rightly, to *blame* and *condemn* himself, as guilty of *Adam*'s first sin? Do you think we are *properly* to blame for the corrupt natures we brought into the world with us, antecedently to our approbation of them, and acting in conformity to them? Or that GOD ever DID or *will* condemn a human creature to *eternal* misery, *purely* for this corruption of nature? Or, that he *may* do it consistent with infinite justice and benevolence?—If not; can I have *proper remorse* for that, as my *sin*, which GOD *will* not, *cannot* impute to me *as my sin*, and for which he *will not*, *cannot* punish me eternally? Can I therefore *blame* and *condemn* myself for *original sin?*

† We are not, I apprehend, in this controversy, to consider the *feelings of awakened convinced sinners*, relative to their original corruption. The very youngest of them have *actual sin* enough to make them most humble, and to make them feel infinitely *guilty* and *unworthy* before GOD. Besides the new views they have of the great corruption of their nature; its infinite opposition to GOD's holiness, and the necessity of its being removed, before they can enjoy GOD, the chief good, must needs fill them with *vast concern* (if not

and *self-contracted* vileness and pollution which *most* distress him at that time. " *The soul that sinneth, it shall die.*" *Original sin*, or, what I would rather choose to term it, *original corruption* (for I know of no original sin, properly so called, but the first transgression of *Adam*), is only of *secondary* consideration, as the source from which actual transgressions flow, and the stock on which they are ingrafted by our own hands, and it therefore ought to be *lamented*, and must be *removed*, in order to the attainment of true holiness.

You say, page 33, " We may hence infer the importance of ministers taking pains to enlighten the people," &c. Page 20, you said that " sinners are so out of the way of rational motives, that GOD's omnipotent power is necessary," &c. And here the preacher is directed to *enlighten* and *offer motives*, as a very important duty, and the *success* not in the least doubted.

Page 35 you assert, " If they saw their *helplessness* was nothing but their *wickedness* (and this they *may* see, or rather *do* see already, without any supernatural means; for there is light in the understanding, &c. p. 19, 20, 25) instead of pretending to wait for GOD's help (as some presumptuously do), they *might* immediately submit to GOD."—*Might* they indeed? This seems to imply some *power to change the will* not granted before, and which indeed I, even upon *my* principles, would not choose to grant: for it is my firm persuasion that the *corrupt human will* will never be changed to any degree of good, without a *supernatural*, *divine* influence.

Now, when the above things are attentively considered, which seem perfectly of a piece with President *Edwards*'s reasoning on the same subject (see his *book on the will*, from p. 22 to p. 26, &c.) and when, to these, is added his doctrine of *external motives*; I think it must evidently appear that your *natural* and *spiritual inability* come at last to the *very same thing*.

remorse) on this head. And these different feelings rising so powerfully and instantaneously in the mind, cannot well be distinguished at that time. When a man *feels himself drowning*, he has no leisure to consider *how* he got into the water; but, perceiving himself in a perishing condition, *eagerly* catches at the hand of a deliverer, anxious to get out of imminent danger. But when, as *divines* or *philosophers*, we coolly and deliberately trace things to their source and origin, we are directly led to consider *how* men came into their present *wretched, helpless* condition, and to vindicate the dealings of GOD with them in *this state*. And this I take to be the proper business of the present controversy.

Next as to your doctrine of *praise* and *blame*, you say (p. 13) "that, in order to know whether a person is to blame, mankind do not enter into the abstruse inquiry, *whether he could help being of such a bad inclination and will*, or *how he came by it?*" But, *my dear Sir*, this is the very *abstruse inquiry* which is *necessary* to be made, in order to justify the ways of GOD to *man:* for, if he "could not help being of such a bad inclination and will," nor ever had it in his power to help it; but came by this perverse temper, not through any fault of his own; you may indeed call his temper *perverse or faulty*,—but I should deem him as *blameless* in being of such a temper, as a heavy body is, in having an invincible tendency and inclination towards the centre of gravity.* "They reasonably conclude," you say, "that such a perverse temper and practice is *faulty;*"—I suppose you mean *criminal*, and *justly punishable*, in the person that has it. "They know that if the person had a *desire*, *heart* or *will* to do otherwise, he could do otherwise; there is no impediment," (what? if he cannot help being of such a temper? if he has no *heart*, *desire* or *will* to do otherwise; nor can have it?) "and, therefore, he is to blame." I think *not guilty*, if the case be indeed so. A child is prick'd by a pin—it winches, cries, and will not be quiet—the nurse pronounces it stubborn—its temper is *perverse* and *bad*—but when

* The distinction which Mr. Knox makes between the *perverseness* or *faultiness* of a certain temper of mind, and the *blameableness* of the individual who possesses this temper, is just and important. This temper may be in itself *faulty* or *perverse;* but if the individual possesses it through *no act of his own*, he is not to *blame* for it. Guilt is contracted and punishment incurred, only by the commission of *actual* sin. On this subject the 9th article of the Church displays that *caution* and *moderation* which distinguish all the articles. This article pronounces concerning "original sin," styled "the fault or corruption of our nature," that "IT deserveth God's wrath and damnation." Sin in *itself* is certainly obnoxious to God's wrath. But if any of his creatures are sinful through no *act* of their own, they cannot be blameable, they cannot be justly obnoxious to punishment. Man, therefore, is not more *blameable* for his original corruption which he inherits, than he is for any bodily infirmity with which he comes into the world. He is *blameable* only for those actual transgressions which through divine grace it is in his power to avoid. Accordingly, the 9th article does not maintain the Calvinistic doctrine, equally abhorrent to reason and scripture, that all men are justly obnoxious to eternal misery for Adam's sin!! Original sin, the corruption of human nature may deserve God's wrath; and yet they who are tainted with this corruption, through no act of their own, be in no respect liable on account of it, to eternal punishment. His actual transgressions, only committed with the choice of his will made free by grace, expose him to this awful doom. *Ed.*

she *inquires* into, and *knows* the cause, she cannot *in justice* pronounce it *criminal*, and *deserving of punishment.* The other instances seem not much to the purpose; because they are all those of *adults*, who may be supposed to have added to original corruption, inveterate habits of vice, by a wilful indulgence; and are, therefore, highly criminal, and justly punishable.

Your definition of *blameableness* (p. 12), where you conclude a person *blameable*, and, consequently, *punishable*, "who has no desire, inclination, will, or endeavour to that which is *reasonable*, *fit*, and *proper* to be done; which is attended with good consequences when done, and to the doing of which there is no insuperable difficulty;" seems pretty unexceptionable; but there seems to be little regard paid to the last clause of it throughout the rest of the discourse. Certainly a person who has sufficient light and knowledge of duty, and of his obligations to perform it, and of the fitness and reasonableness of it, and to the performance of which there is *no insuperable difficulty*, and yet has neither *desire*, *will*, nor *endeavour* towards the performance of it, is *justly blameable* before GOD and man; and *all such*, I believe, without timely repentance, will *bear their iniquity.* The latter branch of the same definition (p. 13) seems to me *defective;* nor could I admit it without a *proviso* which I shall subjoin to it in *italicks.* It runs thus: "When a person has a desire, inclination, heart, and endeavour for that which is unreasonable, unfit, and improper to be done; which he is commanded by GOD not to do, and the doing of which will be pernicious to himself and others; then he is to blame." *Provided*, *nevertheless*, add I, *that the person be a free agent; hath the liberty of choice, and is under no necessitating influence of doing what he does, nor natural inability of doing the contrary.* But the grand difficulty with me, is, how to reconcile, that *fatal train* or *chain* of *causal motives*, by which men are *necessarily determined* in all their *volitions* and *actions*, both *good* and *evil;* in so much that they *cannot will* or *do* otherwise than they actually *will* and *do* (which I take to be precisely President *Edwards*'s scheme); with the *free agency* of the creature, and his rewardableness and punishableness; or with the *justice* and essential universal *benevolence* of the divine Being. *Hic labor, hoc opus est!*

The distinction "that men *can* do otherwise, if they had a

heart and *will* to it," appears to me either *extremely trifling*, or *subtle* and *abstruse* beyond my comprehension: for the scheme against which I militate expressly supposes that the *will itself* (including, I suppose, *heart*, *desire*, and *inclination*) is necessarily *moved* and *impelled* by external motives; *which*, to suppose that it *could resist*, would be to give up the controversy, and to allow the *self-determining* power of the will. So that if this necessary determination of the *will itself* by external motives which it cannot counteract, control, or resist, does not so far destroy *free agency*, as to render the creature *thus* influenced and moved, incapable of *praise* or *blame*, and leave the wicked under a *natural inability* of becoming good, by any means or endeavours within the compass of their own power; I confess I shall for ever despair of being able to draw a certain conclusion from the clearest premises.

I conceive that the liberty of different beings may be *widely*, yea, *essentially* different; and that if we argue from *liberty of will* in GOD, CHRIST, *angels*, and *perfected human spirits*, to liberty of will in *man* in present circumstances, we shall be in danger of falling into very great mistakes. Yet *this*, President *Edwards* and you have both done; and the main stress of your scheme seems to lie upon the inferences from this kind of reasoning. You argue that *virtue* in GOD is *necessary* in the highest degree, and yet he is in the highest degree praise-worthy:—That, on the other hand, vice is necessary in the highest degree in the *devil* and other damned spirits, who are yet in the highest degree *blameable and punishable*.

When you consider *Adam* as breaking the covenant, and abusing a glorious liberty, you cannot help considering him as *more blameable* and *guilty* than a child born of sinful parents in a state of corruption; or even than a common adult transgressor at this day. And when you consider the *angels* as falling from their first state of holiness, without a tempter, you are inclinable to consider them as *more blameable* than *Adam*, as having abused higher privileges, and a more glorious liberty than his. *Angels* and perfected human spirits who are fixed and confirmed in happiness and holiness, have certainly a more perfect freedom of will to good, than is agreeable to *creatures* in a state of trial; i. e. *liberty of will* is a *greater perfection*

in *those* than in *these*. It will be easily allowed also that there are many different degrees of this freedom of the will towards good among Christians, even in this present life, from the *new convert*, the *babe in* CHRIST, the Christian of *imperfect character* and *low attainments*, to the most *confirmed Christians* and *eminent saints;* all these degrees progressively tending nearer and nearer to the glorious liberty of perfected spirits. That virtue is necessary in GOD, and yet highly *praise-worthy*, I am far from denying. But, that liberty or freedom of will in GOD an indefectible being, and in *man* a lapsed creature in a state of probation, is *essentially* or *specifically* the same kind of perfection, is not at all evident, but rather the contrary. GOD is *impeccable* and *indefectible*, not from any *fatal* or *physical necessity*, not by any motives from without, or by any decrees, commands, promises or threatenings from the will or power of a superior being; but by the infinite wisdom, purity, rectitude and perfection of his own nature, which invariably determines him to will and choose that which is fittest and best. So that it may be said in one sense, that GOD is virtuous by *necessity of nature*, and that he *cannot* be otherwise; yet this arises from no *deficiency of power* in the ALMIGHTY, but from the *singular* and *peerless* perfection of his *understanding*, which ever *discerns* that which is good, and rectitude of his *will* which ever *chooses* and *approves* it. Is not moral liberty, therefore, something *singular* in GOD, and *essentially* different from what it *is*, or *can* be, in any creature? None sure is *good*, in this sense, but GOD; the very heavens are not pure in his sight, and he *chargeth his angels with folly*. If elect angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, are now *impeccable* and *infallible*, and their wills have an invariable tendency to good, they are not so in *their own nature;* they owe this *perfection of liberty* wholly to GOD, and depend on influences, motives, and considerations *without them* for the continuance of it; it is an *adventitious perfection* conferred upon, and continued with them to complete their felicity. I would, therefore, beg leave to suppose that the *praise* due to GOD is quite of a different nature and consideration from that due to an imperfect creature, who, in a state of probation, acquits itself well. GOD is infinitely holy by necessity of nature, and is therefore infinitely to be praised, loved, and admired for this

glorious, incommunicable perfection;—to be praised, not because he *does not* act unworthily, but because he is so perfect that he *cannot*.

But when we consider that imperfect kind of liberty, which seems peculiar to creatures in a state of probation, and without which it seems impossible that they should be probationers at all, *praise* and *blame* as applicable to them, seem to be different, and to take their rise from a different source. *Praise*, in my opinion, implies that a man *might* have done *worse;* and *blame*, that he *might* have done *better*. *Blame*, even in *devils*, seems to imply that they have contracted their present inveterate, incurable wickedness, by some *personal fault*, *neglect*, or *abuse* of theirs, which they might have either *prevented* or *remedied*. And *blame* in damned human spirits, I am persuaded, is to be grounded on the same reason. For my part, I should think it altogether as just to blame a man for being *born blind*, as a child for *being born with a corrupt nature;* and therefore think it as certain that no infant shall ever be everlastingly punished *purely* for original corruption, as that there is a *just* and *righteous* GOD. And could I be certain that any human creature was born with such a nature, and placed by an overruling providence in such circumstances of life, as that he could by *no means within his power* obtain reformation; let him be as wicked and mischievous as he would, I should deem him no more *blame-worthy* or *punishable* for being so, than a stone for falling, or water for spreading itself into an horizontal plane. On the other hand, could I conceive an *angel* in a confirmed state of holiness, without any antecedent trial of virtue, I would call such an angel a *holy* and *happy* creature; but could by no means suppose its holiness a *praise-worthy qualification*. The *praise* would be due *only*, and *wholly* to him who made it so.

But the grand argument, "that praise is due to *necessary virtue* even in a *creature*, and that too in a *state of trial*," upon which President *Edwards* lays the greatest stress, and which he thinks is decisive in the controversy, is taken from the *human soul of the man Jesus*, all the acts of whose will are supposed to be *necessarily holy*, and yet at the same time truly *virtuous*, *praise-worthy* and *rewardable*. Mr. *Edwards* has taken uncommon pains to prove the *first part* of this position; because, he says, it has been denied by *Episcopius* and other

Arminians. I confess I can see little weight in what Mr. *Edwards* has said so largely on this head, with regard to the solution of the main difficulty. No Christian I suppose will dispute that there was an *eventual consequential necessity* of the *perfect* holiness of the man *Jesus* (as the Calvinists allow there is of the *sincere* holiness and *final salvation* of elect sinners). The will of the man *Jesus* was invariably determined to good by proper motives suited to his rational nature, and in consequence of the divine *fore-knowledge*, *decree*, *covenant*, *promises*, and the *succours* and *supports* promised and given unto him; that is, it was *impossible* for him to commit sin, in the same sense as it is *impossible* for an elect sinner to be damned;—or it was as *necessary* for him to continue perfectly holy, as it is for an elect sinner to become sincerely holy by conversion, and to be finally saved. Yet who will say that either of these are *necessarily holy* and virtuous, in the same sense or manner that GOD is so? God is *indefectible* and *impeccable* in himself: but will any say that the *human soul* of CHRIST, as a creature, is *thus* necessarily holy; or that it was in the same manner impossible for it to sin? Nay, the very supposition, that it was properly in a state of trial, seems to imply that it was not *impossible in the nature of things* for it to fall. Herein, I think, evidently consists one part of the preeminence of the *second Adam* above the *first.* The one abused a glorious liberty; the other *did not,* although he *might.* We might have thought it impossible for mere man to have preserved this virtue and integrity in such a world and state as this, because *Adam* did not: But GOD hath graciously condescended to convince us of the contrary, by exhibiting an instance of the *possibility* of it in the *man Jesus;* who, although a mere man, and tempted in all points as *Adam* was, and we are, yet continued perfectly *sinless* and *heroically virtuous;*—of which the holy life of CHRIST could have been no proper instance, could we suppose his soul properly *impeccable.* If we suppose the soul of CHRIST *indefectible*, then all his trials and temptations will seem to lose their significancy and propriety: For to what purpose tempt an impeccable being? No supposeable force of temptation can be any trial at all to the virtue of a being wholly *indefectible.* How could such a being *suffer*, *being tempted;* or learn from an experience of the *force* and *weight* of temptations, to *pity*, *sympathize with*, and

succour those that are tempted? It adds little honour, in my opinion, to the moral character of the man Jesus, to say that he vanquished temptations which could cost him no manner of conflict or struggle; that he passed through a state of probation, without meeting one adequate trial of his virtue; and that he merited exaltation and glory by conquering temptations, under which it was impossible for him to have succumbed. CHRIST, therefore, as a man, is to be *praised* and for ever *admired* by all the rational world, for gloriously acquitting himself in a state of trial; for obeying the divine commands, and being encouraged by the divine promises, and thus continuing in a steady, exalted course of virtue amidst the strongest temptations and trials; while it was *possible* for him, in the nature of things, to have done *otherwise*. Nor do I think that this supposition does at all derogate from the glory of the man *Jesus;* but greatly inhances it; seeing it supposes him to have so gloriously improved an *imperfect liberty*, peculiar to creatures in a state of trial. On the contrary; to suppose his human soul indefectible, is to make it equal with GOD.

I also think there is a fallacy in your borrowing your idea of blame-worthiness, from what is so estimated among men, especially upon your principles, as you do, *pages* 13 and 14 of your discourse. If I mistake not, the common sense of mankind runs directly counter to your idea of it. If vile transgressors, thieves, robbers, murderers, &c. are deemed culpable and punishable by human society, it is upon *my principles;* upon the prevailing supposition that they *might* have acted *better*, if they had so pleased;—and not only so, but that they *might* have *willed* and *inclined* better. Their having it in their power to choose a better course, while they neglect this choice, is the very thing which renders them *blame-worthy* in the esteem of human society; and destroys that pity in the minds of men, to which they could be otherwise entitled. Although *madmen* and *lunatics* commit bad actions as much *with their will*, and as *freely*, in your sense of the word, as other men; yet because they are not *moral agents*, in my sense of moral agency, the *blameableness* of such actions in them, is extenuated in exact proportion to the degree of their *madness*. But were it the general, prevailing sense of mankind, that wicked men were under the influence of motives which they could not resist, and

that, in the plan and disposal of providence, it was necessary for them to act just as they do act, we might *pity* them, but sure we could not *blame* them: nay, human society might find it necessary to confine them, as men do *bears* and *lions*, to prevent their doing mischief; or even, in some cases, to cut them off for the benefit and security of others, as we kill a *viper* lest he bite us; but how could we deem them blameable before GOD, or punishable in a future state, for a conduct to which they were impelled by a *fatal* necessity of nature?

I would now beg leave to speak a few words relative to the doctrine of *original sin*, at the freedom of which I hope you will take no offence; and the rather so, when I assure you that I shall *speak* rather *more freely* in this matter, than *I dare to think;* that I may procure solid solutions to some plausible objections against the orthodox mode of explaining it. Men have fallen in *Adam:* from him they have necessarily derived a corrupt nature.—Say what we will of *Adam's federal headship.* yet it seems impossible for us not to believe that this hereditary taint and corruption of nature, is more the *misfortune* than the *fault* of *Adam*'s posterity. Men come into the world in these unhappy circumstances, by no *personal* fault of theirs. It will not, I suppose, satisfy thinking men to say, "That GOD, in his moral government, found all mankind in a corrupt, guilty, miserable, perishing state; and that it is *sovereign mercy* in him to save some, and doing no *wrong* or *injustice* to leave others to perish in this state."

The question will still recur, "How came mankind into this perishing state? was it by their own personal fault? or, was it by the fault of one whom God chose to be their federal head and representative, and who, he foresaw, would ill acquit himself in this department; and therefore by the *determination* and *disposal* of GOD himself?" It will scarce be thought sufficient to relieve this difficulty, to say, "that GOD best knew whom to choose as our federal head, and that none of *Adam*'s posterity were more likely to keep the covenant than himself;" or, "that each of them would have certainly broken it in his own person." Besides that this is only *conjectural* and *inconclusive*, it will be deemed an imputation on the goodness of GOD for making such creatures in such circumstances, that no one of the race could be supposed capable of fulfilling the law of his

creation: It will be farther said, that *all Adam*'s posterity have never had the trial; and that, on supposition of their having had it, and abused it, they would have been then *properly*, that is, *personally* culpable, and the divine disposal might then have stood clear of any plausible impeachment. Nor will it be supposed to clear up the difficulty, to allege, "that sinners have as little reason to find fault with GOD's choosing the *first Adam*, and imputing his *guilt*, as with his choosing the *second*, and imputing his *righteousness;* and yet they never find fault with the latter, as repugnant to the ideas of justice and equity." The two cases are supposed to be widely different. *Mercy* may confer an undeserved favour on the guilty and miserable, without the imputation of *injustice;* yea, it is of its *very nature*, and its *glory*, to do so. Whereas it is thought utterly irreconcileable with our notions of *justice*, to suppose that GOD should so *order* and *determine* things, as that his creatures should be brought into circumstances of guilt and misery by the fault of *another;* and yet eternally punish them for this guilt, without putting it in their power, by a new state of trial and a dispensation of mercy, to recover at least their lost ground; to set them, as it were, where *Adam* first stood, or in an equally advantageous situation.—And if it seems impossible to reconcile this with our ideas of *justice*, how much more with those of *mercy*—and that strengthened by the principle of *universal benevolence*, which is most certainly essential to the idea of the blessed GOD.

According to the doctrine of *particular redemption*, as explained by all strictly calvinistic writers, this idea of the divine justice, mercy and benevolence, can never be consistently held, according to my apprehension of things. These writers begin with men as *lost*, but seem not anxiously to inquire or clearly to determine how they came to be so; or how far it concerns the righteous, merciful and benevolent GOD, to put them into a *salvable* state, or to give them a farther trial for their *lost inheritance*. Not that I think any of the fallen race of *Adam* have any claim to heaven, founded on any of the divine perfections:—But I imagine that the *justice*, *mercy* and *benevolence* of the divine nature entitle them, either to the privilege of an *extinction of being*, or to a chance for happiness equal to what innocent *Adam* had, and from which he fell, involving his posterity with him in a state of corruption and ruin: Thus,

where sin hath abounded, there will grace *equally*, yea *much more* abound, by the *superior* privileges of the gospel.

Upon this, to me, seemingly clear principle of the divine benevolence, I am inclined to believe, that CHRIST has *repaired*, yea *much more* than repaired, the ruins of the fall; and put all mankind in *as good*, yea, in much better and more favourable circumstances than ever *Adam* was in, even in his state of innocency.—I am induced to believe, upon the *same principle*, that no human infant will ever suffer eternal torments, on account of any *original sin* or *corruption* whatever; but that it will be, upon the whole, good for all of them, that they have been born;—*the free gift, by the righteousness of* CHRIST, *coming upon all of them, unto justification of life.*—I am inclined to believe, that no human creature shall ever finally perish, but by his *personal* and criminal abuse or misimprovement of *some state of trial*, by the *right use* of which he might have obtained some measure or degree of eternal happiness.—Through the mercy of GOD in CHRIST, I am induced to believe, that every human creature has it *some how or other* put into his power, to be *as happy* as *Adam* could have been by keeping the covenant of life; if not *much happier.*—And I am farther, on the same principles, induced to believe, that tenders of mercy and salvation in the gospel, are made to *all men*, without any *exception*, *limitation* or *reserve*, on the score of any *divine decree*, or any *election* or *non-election;* and that *all sinners* to whom the *joyful sound* reaches, by virtue of the *offer*, *promise*, *invitation*, and *merciful dispensation* of GOD, have it *properly* put within the reach of their *power*, yea, and *will* too, to *accept* them, and be everlastingly happy.*

* Mr. *Sandiman*, in his letters on *Theron* and *Aspasio*, entering entirely into President *Edwards*'s liberty of spontaneity, ridicules my notion of liberty as *unintelligible* "No man, says he, could ever conceive a notion of liberty higher than what lies in *doing what we please.*" But if we always do *what we please*, or, in other words, *act freely* according to this notion of freedom, what comes of the apostle's assertion, "*to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not;—for the good that I would, I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do.*" Rom. vii. "*Ye cannot do the things that ye would.*" Gal. v. It seems then that the apostle did not always the things that *he would*, or that *pleased him;* consequently that he did not act *freely* according to this *only conceiveable* notion of human liberty—therefore was not a *moral, accountable agent* in any such actions.

Indeed the celebrated declaration of *Medea* is so just, and agreeable to such abundant experience—*video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*—that I see not

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To sum up my sentiments on this head in a few words: I am inclined to believe that CHRIST, by dying for ALL, and purchasing the spirit for ALL, and putting ALL (absolutely the WHOLE GUILTY RACE) in a *salvable state*, has removed the MOUNTAIN *of* NATURAL INABILITY out of the way of ALL *sinners:* so that all who will continue in their revolt and apostacy, and refuse the *purchased, offered*, salvation, shall be *properly* and highly *culpable, condemnable*, and *eternally punishable* for so doing, and shall appear to themselves and to the whole world, to deserve no pity in their everlasting torments.

Page 14th of your last letter you affirm, that till the moment of regeneration, there is nothing in the sinner that is *spiritually good;* nothing but the exertions of that carnal mind which is enmity against GOD," &c. This I know is not a sentiment *peculiar* to yourself, but may be deemed properly *calvinistic*, as it is held by most divines of that party. However I have long doubted the truth of it, and am at a loss to know how it can consist with their doctrine of *common grace*, or what renders it necessary in that scheme of thinking; and much more wherein consists the danger of the contrary sentiment.

I readily grant that before an *effectual, saving change*, there can be no *fixed, uniform, permanent* principle of goodness. The necessity of conversion, in order to a life of true holiness *here*, and the complete enjoyment of GOD *hereafter*, is a truth so *clear* and *self-evident*, that if our Saviour had never said,

how it can be disputed that men often act against their *ultimum practicum judicium;* that the soul has a power of exerting volitions, not only *independent on*, but even *contrary to*, the highest, best, and most apparent motives,—and that the connection between motives in the understanding and the exertions of the will, is not so strict as not to be often broken and grosly violated.

Mr. *Sandiman*, however shuffling and inconsistent in other matters, is nevertheless consistent with himself throughout in his notion of the *fatality of human volitions and actions*. He is ever just to his principle; so far as almost wholly to deny the propriety of *moral suasion;* of *calls, offers, invitations*, or other addresses to the *active* and *elective* powers of the human soul. He ridicules what he calls the *popular doctrine* on this account; and is only for *holding up the naked saving truth to the understanding*,—persuaded that the *elect* will believe and embrace it, and that others *cannot*. And while, in one of his *appendices*, he extols Mr. *Edwards*, as the most masterly and unanswerable writer on the side of, what I call, *necessity*, he blames him of *inconsistence* (I fear too deservedly) in falling into the tract of the *popular preachers* in the practical use of his principles. See Sand. lett. ed. 3 vol. i. p. 245. vol. ii. p. 284, &c.

"*Except a man be born again of the spirit and converted, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*"—we might have inferred it from the principles of reason. No possibility of a *new life*, without a *new heart*, as the source of it. But I deem it inconsistent with the general tenor of scripture to suppose that sinners do nothing *formally* good, or agreeable to the mind of GOD before regeneration and conversion. It is, I think, pretty universally believed by *calvinists*, that there is such a thing as *common grace*, or a common operation of the spirit, influencing all sinners, more especially gospel sinners. It is allowed that GOD is thus striving *more* or *less* with all men, unless such as have out-sinned their day of grace. Nor, without admitting this, can I see how wicked men should be blamed in scripture, for *quenching*, *grieving* and *resisting* the spirit. If this be granted, and yet it be affirmed that unregenerate men do *never comply* with these common operations of the spirit, but *always resist* them; as *Steven* charges the *Jews*; "*Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do* ALWAYS *resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye;*" this needs proof. If the generality of the Jewish nation did, all might not. And if this was the character of the *Jews*, yet it may not be that of all sinners. It seems to have been the guilt of the *Jews* that they did *thus resist*, when they *might* have *complied.* Some of our most orthodox divines have not scrupled to suppose, that some of the finest heathen *characters* and *writings* are the *fruits* of such an influence. But *wherever* the holy spirit of GOD operates, and *so far* as he operates, his effects must be, like himself, *holy;* not only *materially*, but *formally* so. The worst of men are allowed to have some *good* thoughts, desires, purposes and resolutions, and what can these be, but the immediate fruits and effects of this *holy agent?* for we are assured that all our sufficiency is of GOD; that he is the author of every good and every perfect gift; that, of ourselves, we cannot so much as *think a good thought*, and that *in us*, that is, in *our flesh*, or corrupt nature, *dwelleth no good thing.* If any are disposed, for the sake of a *hypothesis*, to deny the *formal goodness* of actions which seem to have all the apparent circumstances of being such, there can be no disputing with them, because there can be no way to convince them, as GOD only can certainly know the *temper*, *motives*, *aims*, and *designs* of the

the contrary. Especially when GOD vouchsafes to *approve* an action, and to declare it *pleasing* and *acceptable* to him, I think we have sufficient reason to conclude, that such an action is *formally good;* even although it should be done by an unregenerate sinner. Was it not some good thing in wicked *Ahab*, to *humble himself* and *walk softly* before GOD? And did not GOD declare his approbation of such a conduct, by sparing the wicked king in consequence?—When the *Ninevites* repented at the preaching of *Jonah*, did they do nothing *formally good*—nothing *pleasing* and *acceptable* to GOD?—Did wicked *Nebuchadnezzar* do nothing *formally good*, when, convinced of his dependent state, he blessed the most High, and praised, honoured and extolled the King of heaven, in the noble and excellent manner recorded, Dan. iv. 34—37?

When our Lord looked upon the *young man* in the gospel, and *loved* him, can we suppose that he saw nothing in him morally good, which was a motive of his *love?* Is it to be imagined that CHRIST would express his love of one, in whom there was *nothing spiritually good, nothing but the exertions of that carnal mind which is enmity against* GOD? Yet we know that this youth was of *very imperfect character;* that his heart was not wholly right with GOD, and that a *good principle* did not *predominate* in him;—in other words, that he was not regenerated.—Did wicked *Herod* do nothing *formally good*, when he heard the *baptist* gladly, and did many things willingly in obedience to his ministry?—When CHRIST tells the *Jews* that the same *John* was a burning and shining light, and that they were willing for a season to rejoice in his light, (John v.) can we suppose that this *temporary rejoicing in the light* had nothing formally good in it, so far as it went? Did it proceed from the *corrupt nature* and *carnal mind* of these *Jews;* or from the influences of the *good spirit* upon their affections?—When the *stony ground* hearers *heard the word, and with joy received it*, and *endured for a while*, may we not suppose that they did something *formally good* and *pleasing to* GOD; although their goodness was like the *morning cloud and early dew which passeth away?*—The cases put by the Apostles, Heb. vi. 4—6, and 2 Pet. ii. 20—22, are generally supposed to be the *cases of unregenerate persons;* yet can we suppose that these persons never did any thing good, or from a right principle?

It is hard to conceive that persons should be *enlightened* and *taste of the heavenly gift*, and be made *partakers of the Holy Ghost*, and *taste the good word of* GOD, *and the powers of the world to come*, and *have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;* and yet, under all these impressions, exercises and discoveries, never have thought *one good thought*, formed *one good resolution*, or done *any one thing pleasing and acceptable to* GOD. I deem it trifling to put off the force of the evidence which these two passages afford in favour of the sentiment I espouse, by saying that these are only *hypothetical* cases put, which *can never* happen in fact. This is making a *nose of wax* of the scriptures with a witness. Nor is it treating the sacred oracles much more respectfully, to explain away these *strong* and *nervous* phrases to nothing, as though they imported nothing more than what happened to *Saul among the prophets!*—When a wicked man, in reading a chapter of the Bible, or hearing a moving sermon, is convicted of a sin, and humbled because of it; is not this a *good thought*, so far as it goes? Is it not *formally* so? And if this *shame*, *humility* and *remorse* should drive him to his knees in secret to ask God's pardon, with tears; is not this a *good action?* I am well aware of what may be said here concerning *natural conscience; mechanical movement of the affections; want of right principles*, &c. &c. but I cannot help thinking that all such convictions and penitential meltings under the *word of* GOD, are, in part at least, the fruits and effects of that dispensation of the spirit which attends a preached gospel; and that, in as far as they are so, they must be *spiritually good*, *pleasing* and *acceptable* to GOD.

You will say that this goodness is not *universal*, *uniform* and *persevering*, and therefore not that *goodness* and *righteousness* which the gospel requires. I grant it: but the question is, "Can an *unregenerate* sinner do *any thing* formally good or pleasing to God?—You will say there is a mixture of imperfection in this kind of goodness, which has the nature of sin: and is there not the same in the *best works* of the *best saints?*—You will say this kind of goodness can merit nothing at the hand of God; can lay him under no kind of obligations to confer any favours on the subjects of it:—Nor, surely, can that of the most holy men upon earth; who are but unprofita-

ble servants when they have done all that ever they shall be enabled to do, under the greatest advantages. In a word, I can see no evident reason for making any other essential difference between these two kinds of goodness than this; that whereas the one is *transient*, *partial*, *temporary*, and *unhabitual;* the other is *universal*, *uniform*, *habitual*, *prevailing*, and *persevering*, arising from the *indwelling* and *abiding* energy of the Holy Spirit, as a sanctifier.

And that men, even in a state of unregeneracy, may be *better* or *worse; farther from* or *nearer to*, a right temper; *more* or *less* pleasing and acceptable to GOD; or rather, more or less *displeasing* to GOD (for I would not choose to say, that ever the *person* or *character* of a sinner, upon the whole, can be said to be *pleasing* or *acceptable* to GOD, before he is *regenerated*, *pardoned* and *justified)* appears not obscurely from what our Saviour says of the young man in the gospel; and more especially from what he said to the *discreet scribe;* Luke xii. 34. *And when* JESUS *saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of* GOD; whereas it is said of others, that *they are far from righteousness;* now if there be indeed such a diversity of character among unregenerate men, as that, while some are said to be *far from righteousness*, others are said to be *near the kingdom of* GOD; what should be the reason of this difference? Can it be said of any two sinners, considered merely in a state of natural corruption, without the interposition of any *supernatural divine* influence, that the *one* of them is *nearer* the kingdom of GOD than the *other?* I think not. Is it not, therefore, the most natural solution of this difficulty, to suppose, that of *two* unregenerate sinners, the *one* may *less resist*, or *better improve*, these common operations of the good Spirit, than the *other*, and consequently be nearer to a *right temper* than he?

As to what you say of *promises to the unregenerate.* You will not, I suppose, dispute that there are many *absolute* and *unconditional* promises made to such, because the whole scripture is full of them;* and that a poor sinner *may* and *ought* to plead these as well as he can in prayer. Indeed, many have gone so ar as to deny that there are any *proper conditions* belonging to

* Ezek. xi. 19.—xxxvi. 26, &c. Jerem. xxxii. 39, &c.

the covenant of grace; and to say that the gospel is nothing but a *pure, unconditional promise* to sinners. The question is, I presume, about *conditional promises to unconverted sinners;* upon the performance of which conditions they are entitled, by the gracious appointment of GOD, to those influences of his spirit, which are *efficacious, converting*, and *saving:* Whether, in short, GOD hath made any gracious promises to the *doings* or *exercises* of persons in a state of unregeneracy?—The answer to this question will, I apprehend, depend much upon that to the former; to wit—"Whether unregenerate men, as such, can do any thing *spiritually good*, or *acceptable* to GOD?" For, if this can be granted in the affirmative; if it be allowed that GOD by his spirit *can* or *does*, in any measure, influence the hearts of unregenerate men, and dispose them to good; I cannot see it "inconsistent that GOD should make promises to such exercises" as are the *fruits* and *effects* of his own blessed spirit. I cannot but think it strange that Christian divines are so cautious in distinguishing between what they call the *common* and *special* operations of the *same divine agent.* Nor can I conceive the reason of the mighty danger they apprehend in allowing, that a sinner may be sometimes under divine influences, and may *in some measure* comply with them, before the moment of his regeneration; or that GOD may oblige himself, by his own gracious promise, to *hear* and *answer* those cries and groans, which are excited by his own spirit.* Does it not

* You say, in your last letter, that "while men think they are doing that which does lay GOD under obligations, even though it be by his own gracious appointment, they will never be those humble souls that submit to and receive the grace of the gospel."—I humbly hope, *my dear Sir*, that you dropped this uncharitable sentence inadvertently. A sentence by which all persons of my sentiments, *Arminians, Methodists*, and others, are cut off from all possibility of ever submitting to or embracing the gospel salvation. Let me put only this single case to your charity. The Rev. Mr. *John Wesley* and *brother*, are supposed at this time to have under them not less than 500 preachers, in *England, Ireland*, and *Scotland.* By a modest computation then, there are not fewer than 60,000 *Wesleans* in these three kingdoms, all zealous of Mr. *Wesley's* peculiar tenets, and yet, in a judgment of charity, generally very *pious* and *devout* men, abounding in the visible fruits of godliness. All these men as *Wesleans*, hold the sentiment here advanced, and are in all respects much more *Arminians* in opinion than I am;—and yet will you venture to suppose, that *not one soul* of these 60,000 persons is "such an humble soul as hath received and submitted to the grace of the gospel; or, as hath ever, in a right manner, submitted to GOD's method of salvation."—I know you will not. The chief ground for charity to *Arminians* from Calvinists, goes upon a favourable supposition that their *hearts* may be better than their *heads;* or, that while they plead for *Arminian doctrines*, they may be tinctured with *Calvinistic principles.* But I imagine this will be found too dubious a foundation whereon to build the noble structure of

sufficiently secure the whole honour of our salvation to GOD, as his own proper work, to believe and be persuaded that corrupt man can do nothing *spiritually good of himself;* nothing *acceptable to* GOD without the influences of his sanctifying spirit;—that all his endeavours, so far as they are *properly his*, are of no account, of no avail with GOD, but *are*, and *must be* wholly displeasing to him; "being no other than the exertions of that carnal mind, which is enmity against GOD;" and that even when GOD *first* works, freely and graciously works upon the soul, the good things which the sinner does in consequence of such operation, have in them no proper merit to *oblige* GOD; being not the *sinner's own*, but GOD's;—and that whatever promises GOD makes to *these exercises*, are, if I may so speak, *unobliged*, *unconstrained*, *unmerited* by the sinner, and arising *purely* and *wholly* from GOD's own merciful nature? Yet these exercises, partaking of the nature of *holiness*, and being the fruits and effects of *holy influences*, there is a congruity and fitness in supposing that GOD should *favourably regard* them, and *encourage* and *reward* them by *farther degrees* of his grace and favour; according to that gospel declaration—*unto him that hath shall be given.*

Nor can I conceive any *merit* (which can render this doctrine *suspected* or *frightful*, as though it tended to depreciate free grace, and exalt human merit) in complying with an external force or impression; or in being led where the spirit gently draws; or in not resisting an impression to the utmost of our power;—though I can conceive a *great deal of demerit* and *guilt* in continuing to resist, oppose, grieve, and quench the same divine agent who would seal sinners to the day of redemption. What divines call a *law-work*, or a preparatory work to conversion, supposes that the Holy Spirit is thus sometimes very long at work on the hearts of sinners; and the *various steps* of this work which experienced Christians have described seem to prove that they have, in some respects, complied with his operations, before the *happy moment* of regeneration, when he took a *full* and *abiding* possession of their

Christian charity: since *as* the *head* is, upon solid scriptural conviction, *such* will the *heart* and *principles* be. So that, if we cannot have charity for a man's principles, I can see no reason why we ought to have it for his person. The whole scheme of Arminian principles I *never could*, and I believe, *never shall* adopt; yet I dare not exclude a man of these principles from my charity.

souls. If the character described, Rom. vii. is, as many have supposed, that of an unregenerate man, *first* ignorant of the law, and *then* enlightened and convicted by it, and continuing under a legal spirit of bondage, until at length he is regenerated and transported with the discovery of gospel grace and liberty, it will fully confirm the truth of the opinion I plead for. We may surely discover some marks of real grace in that character; such as "an approbation of the law of GOD, as holy, just, good, and spiritual; a delight in it, after the inward man; a will to good, and the like:"—yet this very person declares that he is *carnal, sold under sin;* that *in his flesh dwelleth no good thing*—and complains—*O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!*

If we suppose that there are no promises of grace made to the *unregenerate*, it would seem to follow that they have *no encouragement* to seek grace, nor to use any means for obtaining it; more especially if what Mr. *Hopkins* says be true, "that all such means necessarily make sinners *worse* and *more guilty*, before conversion;* and the best thing that unconverted sinners can do, on this supposition, seems to be, to neglect all means of obtaining conversion, as *needless*, yea, *hurtful*, and wait with folded hands the moment of regeneration; confident that GOD will provide food and nourishment for his children as soon as they are born. This sounds like *Sandimanism*, and contradicts those express commands to unconverted sinners—*strive to enter in at the strait gate—turn ye, turn ye—cast away from you all your transgressions, and make you a new heart—repent ye therefore, and be converted*," &c. Sure these commands to unconverted sinners imply *something* that they may be enabled to do, and ought to do, in order to the end proposed; and *which* if they do, they have reason to hope for success. If it be said that these commands are sufficient encouragement to put sinners upon the use of means, I answer, a command to perform a duty can give no encouragement to attempt it, unless the person commanded be either supposed to have POWER to perform it, or has a *promise* of *help* and *assistance* if he attempts it. Whereas it is supposed, in the present case, that the persons commanded are not only without any

* Sermons on the knowledge of the law and regeneration. Pages 54, &c.

power to perform the commanded duty; but that even their *attempts* and *endeavours* to obtain *this power* from another must necessarily render them the more guilty and sinful; that is, must remove them farther from this power than ever. It would follow then, that GOD, by enjoining these commands upon unregenerate sinners, sets them upon the certain means of increasing their guilt and condemnation.

The command of a superior cannot be deemed equitable, where the *commanded inferior* has not a power of obeying; unless such inferior has criminally lost this power, by his *own fault*. Wherefore all GOD's commands to his impotent creatures imply a promise of assistance to all who ask it, and attempt obedience in consequence; otherwise his commands would not be equitable. To illustrate this give me leave to put the following case. You are a *master*, and have a number of *slaves*, who, being your property, are subject to all your lawful commands. You say to one go, and he goeth; to another come, and he cometh, &c. Among these your slaves are a *father* and a *son*. The father breaketh the son's leg. Knowing the accident, you repair to the lame young slave, and lay your authoritative command on him to go on an errand. The slave answers, "I cannot, master, my father has broken my leg." To this you reply, "I have not lost my *right of commanding*, because you have lost your *power of obeying*—you ought not to have become impotent—the command is lawful in itself—it is fit and right that a *slave* should do his *master's* errands; wherefore go directly whither I command you, or you shall be severely chastised." To this the impotent lad—"True, master, the command may be right in itself, but to me it is impossible. I pray, have my leg cured, or get me a wooden leg, or let one assist me, and I will go whither thou commandest." —Would we deem such a command *equitable* without such assistance? How much *less* so still, could we suppose the master so to have *ordered*, *appointed*, and *predisposed* things, as that the father must *necessarily* and *unavoidably* break his son's leg; and that to illustrate some dispositions of his, which he would have made known to the whole family?—Promises of assistance are, therefore, necessarily implied in all GOD's commands to unregenerate sinners of *Adam's* race.

Encouragement and *hope* must be founded on some *divine*

promise or *declaration.* GOD must *cause* us to hope, or we can have no ground to encourage us to hope; and the ground of this hope must be *his word.* If then there be no ground of hope in GOD's word to encourage the prayers and endeavours of unregenerate sinners, they can have no encouragement either to *pray* or *endeavour;*—not even to say, "*Lord be merciful to me a sinner;*—or, *help, Lord, else I perish.*"—You say, "you are a poor unrenewed sinner," and ask, "what you shall do?" I tell you to pray for a new heart, to pray for the regenerating grace of GOD, and to be found in the diligent use of all the appointed means of grace. "To what purpose pray, say you; God hath never promised to *hear* or *answer* the prayers of an unregenerate sinner: he *cannot:* it is inconsistent: besides, all my endeavours to *enter in at the strait gate* are not only unavailable, but also offensive to GOD, and will only aggravate my guilt."—Suppose, *my dear Sir*, that one of the sinners of your congregation should *thus* address *you;* would you not instantly set him upon *praying*, *striving*, and *endeavouring*, with *hope of success* in the use of means?—Would you not show him the grounds of a sinner's hope, from the word of GOD? Would you not more particularly point out to him those cheering and exhilarating words of the LORD *Jesus*, so well adapted to such a case as his (Luke xi. 9—13), *I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth: and he that seeketh findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?* In the illustration of which fine and comfortable passages of scripture, I beg leave to borrow the words of a *pious*, *amiable* and *reputedly orthodox divine*, who, by the bye, is no friend to *Arminian* principles. "All who enjoy the gospel have reason to expect the necessary assistance of the spirit. *Our heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him;*—to *all that ask him.* Luke xi. 13. Nor must it be said, that we can't ask aright. No doubt we are capable of such asking as is required, and made

the condition of our receiving; otherwise here was a promise, and no promise; a promise to make us despair, rather than encourage us. I don't pretend to solve all difficulties here; but the notions GOD has taught us to entertain of himself, of his justice, wisdom, mercy and goodness; the declarations he has made of himself in his word, assure us that he *will not, does not*, lay our salvation upon things *absolutely out of our own reach.* Whatever weakness, impotency and inability we are under by reason of the fall, a sufficient remedy is provided through a Mediator. And when GOD has appointed us so many duties, all tending to our advantage, and promised to assist us therein, and to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him, we *must* conclude these duties *are possible*, and that the necessary assistance shall not be denied; otherwise we make him *a hard master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering what he has not strowed.* In short, none shall perish for want of necessary assistance on GOD's part: none can justly say, though they sinned, they could not help it;—nor shall be able to say in hell, that though they are damned, they could not help it. Such a plea would afford a relief the place of torment does not admit of; would cool the tongues of the damned, and, in a great measure, quench the flames of the burning lake. *All there* will be convinced that GOD was *real*, not only in his *threatnings*, but also in his *promises* of *grace* and *help.* And this conviction will render them utterly defenceless, fill them with silent horror; and, when under the just sentence of GOD, leave them for ever speechless. Matt. xxii. 12."*

I now come briefly to consider the three concluding questions of your last letter.

Quest. 1. "Why do some persons think the Calvinistic doctrine consistent with a God of infinite love, &c. and others the contrary?—What is the reason why persons of *equal capacity*" (I should have liked the question much better if you had added, and of *equal piety* too) "have such different sentiments respecting the divine nature?"—I answer in brief (if you allow of the addition inserted in the *parenthesis*, and I think your charity must allow it)—Because this difference of sentiments, in these *deep, abstruse, metaphysical* matters, is a much less es-

* *Bennet's* Christian Oratory, edit. 4. vol. i. p. 380.

sential matter than we make it to be. Men, by poring long on one scheme of thought, get so in love with it, and contract such a high sense of its importance, that they imagine *truth* must *stand* or *fall* with their beloved *hypothesis*. There is a bewitching pleasure in *excogitating schemes*, *linking them together*, *and bringing* them into form: and every man, or set of men are generally so attached to their own favourite scheme, that they are too apt to think that *they alone* have the truth; and that all others are *wrong*, *very wrong*, so far as they differ from *them*:—as in proportion to their zeal for what they suppose to be important truth, and the measure in which they have wrought themselves up into the love and admiration of their own favourite system; in the same proportion they will be zealous against all other systems, and will imagine them destructive of all true religion. Men of enlarged minds and universal reading cannot help seeing this truth but too clearly; and racks, tortures, inquisitions, and persecutions, are some of the sad fruits of this *narrow*, *engrossing*, *anti-catholic* spirit. Whereas, if the good GOD saw this diversity of sentiment in these matters to be so very *essential* and *important* as we make it to be, he would certainly *unite all his saints*, and make them of *one mind* in these things; and would by no means suffer those who love and serve him with all their hearts, and with the truest zeal, to continue under such *absurd*, *atheistical*, and *blasphemous* errors, as we affect to call them.

Of three men, equally intelligent, equally learned, equally pious, one is a *thorough Calvinist*, another a *moderate Calvinist*, and the third yet *more of an Arminian*. What is the reason? —why, these men have been accustomed from their infancy to read different authors, to hear and converse with men of different principles; and have been led to weigh and consider attentively different difficulties in religion; and hence (as well as from a number of other supposeable causes and motives) have been led to form to themselves different schemes of religion; yet all of them perfectly agree (yea, *must* agree) in every thing *truly essential*.

If I might be allowed to enlarge a little farther upon a subject, the abuse or misunderstanding of which, if I mistake not, has been the source of all uncharitableness among Christian brethren, I would hazard and endeavour to *support* and *illus-*

trate the following conjecture, viz. That error in opinion is unavoidable by man in the present state; and, so far as it is so, must be innocent.—Although *truth* is but *one*, that is, but *one* of 10,000 different opinions concerning one object of knowledge, can be the *true opinion;* yet the objects of knowledge are next to infinite in their number. GOD, knowing himself, his perfections and works, has a *perfect*, *unerring* comprehension of all truth. But a very few objects of knowledge are revealed to men; and even amongst *these* many are too large for their limited capacities, and can be viewed by them only *superficially*, in *part*, and, as it were, *by peacemeal.* Among men also there is a great diversity of capacities, opportunities, and advantages for *discovering* and *discerning* truth. Hence it happens that different men are led to view the *same object* of knowledge in the *different parts* of it, and with *different degrees of advantage.* No man ever saw, or ever can see even all *knowable truths* in their full extent, and in the proper connection with each other, and dependence on each other. Hence it appears demonstrably, from the very nature of human infirmity and imperfection, that *men must* err in some respect or degree; and the more objects of speculation the human understanding is employed about, and the more sublime and incomprehensible these objects are in themselves, in the more instances it is still liable to err: in other words, errors are, as it were, necessarily multiplied by an increase of knowledge. Hence it will also follow, that as religion lays before the human understanding the *sublimest speculations* and the most *incomprehensible objects*, men will be more liable to error in their *religious opinions* than in any other. If it be said that *divine revelation* affords a sufficient remedy against error in religious opinions, as it exhibits a *perfect* and *unerring rule of faith;* I grant that this is strictly true, with regard to all those truths or objects of knowledge which are *essentially necessary* in order to the *duty* and salvation of sinners; otherwise *divine revelation* would be by no means adequate to the purpose for which it was given:—but that it is not equally true with regard to multitudes of *unessential matters*, which nevertheless are deemed *objects of religious knowledge*, and *subjects of religious speculation*, is abundantly evident from the differences of opinion among the best of men about these matters, in every succeed-

ing age of the Christian Church. It is of the nature of the human mind to be *active*, *curious*, and *inquisitive;* and an increase of knowledge sharpens the appetite of the mind: in plainer words; "the more we know, the more we desire to know." And there is no limits to this appetite: not satisfied with plain wholesome food; not satisfied with plain necessary truths that are clearly revealed, our curiosity and thirst of knowledge lead us to attempt the knowledge of the most difficult and incomprehensible matters; and that too in all their *causes*, *reasons*, *effects*, and various *bearings* and *dependencies*. This is not all; the human mind is delighted with beauty, symmetry, order, and proportion. It delights to arrange its ideas, and to make out and see the connection between truths; or how one truth depends on another. Hence the fondness for *theories;* for *schemes* or *systems* of truth. Now, from what has been said above of the imperfection of human knowledge, in *single* and *particular* objects, it will follow that men will be vastly more liable to err in *schemes* or *systems* of doctrines, where so much depends on the due connection of truths, than in any *single*, *detached* object of knowledge whatever. Yet men *must* have their systems, and consequently they *must err*. None but GOD, who knows all things in their natures, bearings, and dependencies, can make a system of truth *free from all error*. The Bible does not lay down divine truths *systematically*, and thereby seems to teach us that systems are not absolutely necessary for us: every man, therefore, if he will have a system, must arrange divine truths as well as he can, for himself. If it were to be narrowly inspected into, I am persuaded it would appear, that *no two* men upon earth have the same system of religious sentiments throughout; nor could conscientiously adopt and subscribe, *in the same sense*, any long set of religious articles: Therefore no one human system of religion can be right throughout. But such errors as necessarily arise from the infirmity and imperfection of the human mind, are certainly innocent. GOD, for wise and good purposes, permits these errors to take place; and is doubtless even glorified by these *unessential differences* of opinion; which, if debated with charity, candour, and moderation, are perhaps a profitable exercise of virtue, knowledge, genius, and diligence.

While you, for instance, plead for the sovereignty of GOD,

according to your view of it, you mean to exalt the *divine glory* without intending any prejudice to the *divine justice* and *goodness*. While I plead for the *justice*, *mercy*, and *benevolence* of GOD, according to my view of them, I mean to exalt the divine glory, without intending any prejudice to his *sovereign independency*. If I adopted your scheme without *your ideas* of the divine sovereignty, I should injure GOD in my heart, by thinking unworthily of him. If you adopted my scheme throughout, without *my ideas* of the divine justice, mercy, and benevolence, you would probably dishonour and offend the MOST HIGH in the same manner. Our ideas of these divine perfections must be radically changed before we could, with a good conscience, come wholly over to each other. Both of us, doubtless, err in some parts of our respective systems; yet both of us may be right in honestly endeavouring to promote the glory of GOD, according to our best view of things. Both of us, therefore, may be pleasing and honouring GOD to the best of our ability, and may be therefore *accepted* of him, and ought to exercise *mutual charity* to each other. If we cannot change one another's ideas in these matters, we cannot, *salvâ conscientiâ*, come over the whole way, one to the other. If we are honest, and yet, in any thing *essential* err, GOD will, doubtless, show it unto us. If our errors are *unessential*, GOD may leave us in them till death, and bring us together in the future world, where we shall *know*, and *harmonize in* the *true system* in its full extent.

When I conceive of the *great* GOD, and suffer my mind to dwell upon him but for a moment, I conceive of him as the most *just*, *holy*, *amiable*, and every way *adorable* Being: and when I would conceive of his exhibition of himself to his creatures, in his works of creation, providence, and redemption, I conceive of him as acting every way *worthy of himself*.—When, therefore, I would attempt to adopt a scheme of thought concerning his operations *ad extrâ*, and the plan of these operations as formed in his all-comprehensive mind before their coming into existence, I would incline to choose that which, upon the whole, seemed best to comport with my *highest* and most exalted idea of his *moral character*. Wherever any thing, in any scheme, seems to clash with this idea, or contradict it, I immediately reject this system, by whatever authorities supported;—not that I

dare absolutely condemn such a scheme as *false* and *fundamentally erroneous*—seeing the error may lie in my own *conceptions* and *reasonings;* but in present circumstances I *must* reject it, however true; because, to my apprehensions, it is inconsistent with infinite moral rectitude and excellence. So that, before I dare conscientiously adopt such a scheme, either my *idea* of *moral excellence* must be *altered*, or my *reasonings* from this idea *rectified*—in short, I must be *convinced of error.*

Quest. 2. Does GOD's foreknowledge depend on his decree; "or his decree upon his prescience?"—*Ans.* I do not know that the holy scriptures are decisive on this nice, metaphysical speculation. *Known unto* GOD *are all his works from the beginning of the world. Whom he foreknew, them he also predestinated*, &c.—Might I dare to give my opinion of this matter, I would venture to say that, perhaps, in some instances, GOD's foreknowledge may go before his decree; and that, in other respects, his decree may be supposed, in the order of nature, before his foreknowledge. I am loath to use the word *depend* upon this occasion. Besides, there is such an *unity* and *simplicity* in all the *internal* acts and operations of the DEITY, that we are in danger of falling into very erroneous blunders when we go about to distinguish them. However, as it is in some respects necessary, in order to help our conceptions of things, to consider *understanding* and *will* as two distinct faculties in the divine Being, and to distinguish between the *acts* and *exercises* of these two faculties; I think I can conceive of the MOST HIGH as *first willing* and *decreeing* to make an universe, inhabited by such and such ranks and orders of created beings, and designing his own glory and the greatest good of his creatures in so doing. I can then conceive of him as *fore-seeing* and *fore-knowing* what course such creatures would take, according to their respective natures, liberty, and circumstances. And then I can conceive of a *subsequent decree* to *over-rule*, *govern*, and *direct* the free actions and volitions of these creatures, so as that in the issue they may be made to subserve the purposes of his own glory, and the greatest possible good of the system. But indeed, *my dear Sir*, these are speculations so very *high* and *bold*, that the less we meddle with them, the less risk we shall run of *speaking presumptuously*, and of *darkening counsel by words without ideas.* Job xxxviii. 2.

Quest. 3. "If GOD should now create one or more moral agents, with all the freedom that ever creature had, and put them into a state of trial, so as to leave them in the greatest *equilibrium*, could he foresee how these creatures would acquit themselves?"—*Ans.* Yes, certainly; otherwise his *prescience*, and consequently his *knowledge*, could not be *infinite*. I am not *Socinian* enough to deny the infinite and most perfect prescience of him *whose understanding is infinite;* the ONLY WISE GOD:—I think the fulfilment of prophecy, with regard to the volitions and actions of creatures whom I take to be in a state of proper moral agency, furnishes an irrefragable proof of this truth. Although the *quomodo* of this prescience is *too high for me; I cannot attain it;* yet I do not entertain the least doubt of it. I conceive that GOD made *Adam* thus; yet did he foresee his fall, and had a remedy in store before the foundation of the world. Nor can I guess what concession you would draw from me by this *query;* or what use you would make of it against my principles. I believe GOD so perfectly knows the natures of free agents, and the circumstances they are in, and what effect these circumstances will have upon them, as perfectly and unerringly to know the course they will take in consequence; while (which makes the grand difficulty in conceiving of this prescience) he knows at the same time, that they had it *in their power* to have taken a *different course*, and that in many instances they *ought* to have done so. As, therefore, this kind of foreknowledge has no manner of influence upon the conduct of such free agents, I believe that God may be perfectly justifiable in not interfering to prevent their taking the wrong course, which he *foreknew* they would take. Will you say that GOD's making such creatures, and putting them into such circumstances as he *foresaw* would *tempt* and *prevail* with them to apostatize, and giving them such a liberty as he *foreknew* they would abuse; is making their *fall* and *apostacy as necessary* as any *positive decree*, or *chain of external motives* whatever could have done;—and that, therefore, in the issue, my scheme will come to the very *same thing* with *yours*, and that of the most rigid *Calvinists?*—I think, not at all. The scheme of rigid Calvinists (if I understand it) supposes a *causal* necessity; mine only a *consequential* one. I cannot think of an event *positively decreed*, and brought to pass by *prevailing*

external motives; but I must think of that event as brought into existence by a necessity of *influence* and *coaction;* that is, by a *fatal necessity.* But when, upon my scheme, I consider GOD as putting a free agent into circumstances of trial, in which he foresaw he would abuse his liberty, while he was endued with a sufficient power to have made a glorious use of it, and to have acquitted himself well in his trial; I can see nothing in this state of the case, whereby GOD can be in the least chargeable with the *fall* or *apostacy* of such a free agent. The simple prescience of GOD can have no manner of influence on this event. The thing happened, indeed, just as GOD foresaw that it would; but it happened wholly by the fault of the creature, and *in the nature of things* it might not have happened. It did not happen *because* GOD *foresaw it;* but GOD foresaw it, because it *would happen.* I know it is scarce possible to speak on this subject with such *clearness* and *precision*, as to guard against the attacks of a subtle opponent; yet I think I have pretty clear ideas of a wide difference between my scheme and that which I oppugn.—But, be this as it will, it is God's providential dealings towards the unhappy, corrupt offspring of *such offenders*, who never abused this kind of liberty, nor *properly*, that is, *personally* demerited the divine displeasure, which I am concerned to vindicate against the principles of thorough Calvinists. Suppose such delinquents to be *spared*, and permitted to propagate their own kind, and replenish the earth with a *corrupt*, *helpless*, *miserable* progeny; the question with me is, How it becomes a GOD of infinite *power*, *wisdom*, *justice*, *benevolence*, *holiness*, and *mercy*, to deal with such his corrupt, helpless, miserable creatures?

Thus you see, *my dear Sir*, how *largely* and *freely* I have opened my whole soul before you, with all its errors, weaknesses, and infirmities. I have said, and I would have you to bear it in mind, that I have done it in the humble capacity of a *learner*, seeking the truth, and desirous to embrace it. If I am wrong, *pity* me, *instruct* and *correct* me, but do not exclude me from your charity. Believe me, at least, to be actuated by *simplicity* and undissembled *sincerity* in this exposition of my sentiments and doubts. I would not have thus *opened* and *retailed* myself but to a *friend*—a *candid*, *generous*, *intelligent*, *Christian* friend. Bigots would *anathematize* me for these

sentiments; but you, *Sir*, have *more sense* and *more candour*. Your mind has been long conversant about these speculations: you well know their *depth*, and how difficult it is to form a right judgment upon them; and, therefore, *can have charity* for those who are puzzled and perplexed in search of truth, through these aerial regions of *metaphysical speculation*. It is the happy privilege of those only who never thought *deeply* or *freely* about these matters, to find *no difficulty* in understanding them. Inquisitive, thoughtful men, who have knocked off the trammels of early prejudice, see a thousand perplexing difficulties where dull plodders on a system see all things *plain* and *easy*, all *truth* and *demonstration*.—Nor would even these good qualities in you have induced me to have been thus *circumstantial* and *undisguised*, were I not in hopes thereby of drawing from you, or the Rev. Mr. —— (to whom, with my love, I give you liberty to communicate this hasty, incorrect scrawl) a farther explanation of your scheme, and some solid answers to my objections against it.

But now, that this letter is about to be submitted to the public, the *author* foresees, without the spirit of prophecy, that he is like to procure himself abundance of enemies. Bigots among the *Calvinists* will call him an *Arminian;* and with them there is little difference between an *Arminian*, an *heretic*, and a *devil*. *Arminians*, on the other hand, will disclaim him, as too much a *Calvinist;* and with them there is little difference between a *Calvinist* and an *ideot*. As to those *poor narrow souls* of both sides who confine religion to *a party*, and who imagine that *piety* and *good sense* are their own property *exclusively;* the author, knowing them to be *short-sighted*, pities them, and holds their censure in contempt. He is much more concerned lest he should incur the displeasure of *his brethren* (whose judgment he venerates and respects, and whose persons he loves with the truest affection) by the *boldness* and *freedom* of some of his sentiments. He has reason, however, to hope that his apology for this will be deemed satisfactory. Be this as it may, the *die* is now cast; and after the maturest deliberation, he judges it best upon the whole to publish the letter.

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You will perceive that I have observed little or no method

in this letter, but have negligently and immethodically followed the train of my thoughts, wherever they have led me. I would not, however, wish you to imitate me in this. My difficulties may be arranged under a very few heads, and distinctly answered; which will save much labour, while, at the same time, it will be more useful and edifying to,

Reverend and dear Sir,

Your very affectionate Brother
and obedient Servant,
HUGH KNOX.

Saba, June 26, 1770.

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